



The Shalimar Adventure

BUNNY REUBEN

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*for
that fabulous showman
and lovable friend*

GULSHAN RAI

*who first inspired the
men behind Shalimar
and for*

SURESH SHAH

*who made the dream
a reality*

FOREWORD

Co-production!

That magic word, evoking rosy visions of semi-naked Hollywood actresses and famous Hollywood directors, coming to shoot a film in India, has echoed through the years in Follywood, a name I coined twenty-five years ago for the Indian movie-industry in the columns of the *Sunday Standard*, for which I was the film-critic.

Yet, for various reasons which shall become apparent as we go along, the concept of a co-production in India between a foreign production unit and an Indian one, has always fizzled out.

Whenever someone, an Indian from abroad or a foreigner, has come down to Bombay and dazzled the press with big talk about co-productions, the pen-pushers have always sneered at them.

Time, and the bureaucrats in New Delhi and elsewhere, have invariably proved the pen-pushers right.

This time too, someone came out from America to India and shot a great deal of big-talk to the press about *co-production*; this time too, the pen-pushers sneered at him, called him a conman and predicted confidently that the film would never be made. Surprisingly enough, however, as subsequent events unfolded, time proved the sneerers, the cynics and the knowall pen-pushers wrong.

The brash, big-talking Indian from America pushed through his announced plans with the tenacity of a bull. He talked big—and he made the big talk come true. He planned and pro-

moted India's first genuine co-production. He brought well-known foreign stars to India. He made two films—the Indian-language as well as the international, English-language version, in the time an average Indian movie producer takes just to discuss the first few scenes of his projected script—three months! He was the first man to come and make a Hollywood film in India, he overcame incredible odds and got away with it.

His name is Krishna Shah.

He is an America-based, India-born film director whose first feature film, *Rivals*, got rave reviews and won praise at international film festivals, and whose second feature film, *The River Niger* with an all-black cast became a box-office hit in the West.

The Hollywood film he made in India is *Shalimar*.

From the moment word of it was first leaked to the press, to the day when Gina Lollobrigida was flown out to Bombay for the glittering *muhurat* (launching) of the movie, to the day when Rex Harrison and his two dozen hat-boxes arrived, to the day when John Saxon and Sylvia Miles came in, to the day when the American and British technicians arrived, and finally to its last shooting day, and the day of preparing the first rough-cut version in Bombay, *Shalimar* was a great adventure.

Now that the great adventure is behind its major participants, and the film is on the eve of its world-release, now that Krishna Shah has made a Hollywood film in India and actually got away with it—incidentally causing the scoffers to eat their words—the incredible, behind-the-scenes story of the *Shalimar* adventure can be told.

It is basically Krishna Shah's story.

It is also the story of Suresh Shah and his Ramon House group who poured in untold millions of rupees in order to make Krishna Shah's dream come true.

BUNNY REUBEN

Bombay

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HERO'S HOMECOMING

The *Shalimar* project materialized quite suddenly...and unexpectedly.

Writer-director Krishna Shah, an India-born, Hollywood-based film-maker, married to an American girl and settled in Los Angeles, had come through a chequered career of stage and screen to make *Rivals*, his first feature film. After *Rivals*, Krishna made *The River Niger* and the picture clicked. In *Variety* it was listed among the twelve biggest box-office hits of mid-1976.

Krishna was beginning to get a taste of American success, which I suppose is the most intoxicating kind of success for any movie-man, whichever part of the world he hails from. This, plus the sheer geographical distance and the intervening years, had caused him to drift far from his home-country and people.

"I would not even talk to my family in India, long-distance!" Krishna confessed ruefully. "I had this silly superstition about long-distance calls because once before I'd spoken to my sister who was ill and, a couple of weeks later, she died."

Krishna was then travelling all over America to promote *The River Niger*. His house used to be full of newspapermen, and "there was a very festive feeling in the air."

Even as *Niger* was riding high, Krishna Shah got involved in another project with Jeff Bridges called *Crush*. He was getting in deep on this when his wife Diane began to persuade him to

make a trip to India, and to take her and their son, Judd, with him.

Krishna's elder brother Bhupendra, a well-known Rotarian and a flourishing businessman in Bombay, broke the superstition about this no-long-distance-call business. He rang kid-brother Krishna and went at him to come back to India.

Bhupendra kept on saying: "Krishna, why don't you make a movie here?"

And Krishna kept replying, "Fine! Fine! I'll do one," without having the faintest idea about the hows, whys and wherefores.

The truth of the matter is that Big Brother Bhupendra, as a popular Rotarian and Toastmaster, was very friendly with a number of big-wigs in the Indian movie-industry, and the movie-bug had bitten him. Unconsciously, sitting in a little air-conditioned cubicle in an office in his prosperous Motor Parts Retail Sales Centre on Lamington Road—which, ironically, is not only a meeting-place for motor-parts dealers, but is also the centre of the Indian film industry's exhibition and distribution trade—Bhupendra dreamed of the spotlights and the fanfare, and longed to be a part of the celluloid world, too.

So he spent a lot of money on long-distance calls. He was "cooking up" something here, without at that stage telling kid-brother Krishna about it. So he kept on at Diane: "Come on out to India," he said to his American sister-in-law. "You'll find it's a swell country and we're all swell people here."

So Diane, in turn, kept on at Krishna.

As American as his America-based kid] brother, Bhupendra now switched on the hard-sell. He promptly followed up his persistent phone-calls to Diane by sending out an air-ticket to Krishna!

This is how Destiny works.

Was it Krishna who set the ball rolling?

No. It was Bhupendra.

And the man who'd fired Bhupendra's imagination, who was the real reason why the movie-bug had bitten this prosperous businessman was a Mike Todd-type showman named Gulshan Rai.

A leading film-financier, distributor and exhibitor, Gulshan Rai had in recent years become a successful producer too. Aside from Raj Kapoor, he is the only man in Indian films who thinks like a showman, and who comes across flamboyant, colourful and B.I.G.

It was Gulshan Rai who cast the magic spell on Bhupendra.

Listen to Krishna Shah tell it: "Gulshan Rai and Bhupendra are good friends, and Gulshan used to say to Bhupendra, *Ask your brother to come down and we'll do a picture together.* Bhupendra used to write to me long letters about Gulshan and Gulshan and Gulshan—and that I must come back soon!

"But doing a picture in India at that time was nothing to me. It left me cold. I wouldn't even think about it. Then Bhupendra sent me that ticket and almost at the same time I heard that my father was very ill. So I decided to visit India again."

When the time is ripe, the various keys of Fate click in harmony and a new pattern emerges. It happened that way with Krishna Shah.

Right at that time, another key clicked. The veteran Indian newspaperman M.V. Kamath of the *Times of India* stationed for years in Washington D.C. had seen *The River Niger* in Washington. The film had moved him profoundly, enough to cause him to track down its maker telephonically for an interview. Kamath did get Krishna on the line, and the long talk resulted in a long interview—Krishna's first detailed interview in one of India's top newspapers.

Talking of coincidences, Krishna Shah arrived in Bombay on a Monday morning in June 1976. Just the previous day, a half-page story in *The Times of India Magazine Section* had

been published on Krishna Shah and *The River Niger* and all about how a local Indian boy had made good in Hollywood.

To put it mildly, it had a terrific impact. It couldn't have been timed so well even if Krishna had tried to do so, consciously.

"I had no idea about it!" Krishna Shah grinned. "When I landed in Bombay I found my brother and the rest of the family overawed, overwhelmed, and they were all looking on me as something great! It didn't matter to them that I was a success back there in America. What mattered most to them was that I'd had a half-page in the *Times of India*! It was like a stamp of approval, a kind of royal heralding of my arrival in India!"

It was a royal homecoming, a hero's homecoming. And willy-nilly it put an enormous onus on Krishna—the onus of having to live up to it.

THE BIG DECISION

"Seeing India after fourteen years was mind-boggling! Seeing Bombay was equally mind-boggling.

"Two things were happening to me at once: I was seeing India through the eyes of *Time* magazine—and at the same time the distorted image was taking time to settle in its proper perspective.

"After spending the better part of my life in America, my notions about India were like those of the typical American tourist.

"It is incredible, how one is brainwashed by the mass-media. I am an Indian, and if I can be so thoroughly brainwashed by the American mass-media's image of India, how much more would the average American be?"

When Krishna Shah landed in Bombay on the wings of that half-page interview in the *Times of India* he was the small-town boy who'd made good. His innumerable relatives were clamouring around him, lionizing him as their own *success symbol*. Naturally, he had to organize things in such a way so as to be able to bring his two films to Bombay to show to the folks back home.

"Government of India had given me permission to bring *Rivals* and *The River Niger* out to India. I said I wanted to show them to my family as a proof of all that I'd done during the fourteen years I'd been in America."

It was in trying to get the prints of these two films cleared

through Customs that Krishna Shah had his first brush with the bureaucracy.

"The Customs gave me a problem," Krishna reminisces. "And I had to go through hell to clear the prints. We had to approach the I & B Ministry, and because it was Emergency time we had lots of trouble."

Things began to move fast now.

Almost immediately, Krishna Shah was grabbed by Indian movieland's social whirl. He was invited to all kinds of parties. The press began lionizing him. All at once, Krishna Shah had arrived, both in Indian filmland as well as in the Indian fan-mags.

"It was so amazing," chuckled Krishna Shah, "I would buy all kinds of fan-magazines and read them at night. It was like seeing Hollywood of the thirties and forties. To me, it was like reading history. I was aware that the movie-industry in the West was kind of dying, especially Hollywood. But we in Hollywood were fighting it hard. Every project we took up as a battle against television. Here in India, television was just an infant. Movies were the biggest thing."

The moment Krishna Shah got back, the first thing Bhupendra did was to bring him and showman Gulshan Rai together. There were innumerable meetings. Gulshan Rai, an ardent believer of a saint in the Punjab called Bhrigujeet, had just got back from Hoshiarpur (a little town in the Punjab where the Bhrigu centre is located) and he was full of remarkable stories about Bhrigujeet's incredible omniscience.

"He would discuss the saint with me at length," Krishna Shah said. "And hard-sell me into going there and seeing him. I got very close to Gulshan in those days. I met all kinds of film people at his house. I'd talk to those people and I gained a lot of valuable information about the Indian movie-industry from them."

By now Krishna Shah had managed to get the print of *Rivals*

cleared from Customs and he screened it seven or eight times for all sorts of movie people and for the press. Talking about the press, Krishna Shah went on record to say:

"The newspapers were very, very generous here [meaning Bombay]. Newspapers here, for what reason I cannot say, championed me always. They went out of their way to publicize me. Many a time they wrote articles about me. They made me out to be something more than what I was, or what I am."

It was all very exciting, very intoxicating, and at some point right then it was also too much for Krishna Shah to resist. His father was ill and back again in the midst of his large family. The old nostalgia overcame him and he decided to spend a year or two at home.

This decision, plus his immediate involvement with the big names in Indian films here, made it easy for Krishna to decide to make a film in India.

THE GOLD RUSH BEGINS

The mad rush to grab Krishna Shah—the Hollywood personality—was now on!

“All kinds of people were making all kinds of offers to me,” said Krishna. “One day I went to see Tarachand Barjatya of Rajshree Pictures and he was the first to make me an offer to do a film with him.

“He said I could do a picture on whatever subject I wanted and at that time I thought I’d do a film on India’s over-population. I’d worked out a rough story-line on this, and I thought I’d use my expertise to do a commercial movie on over-population, to make Indians aware of their most crucial problem.”

But Tarachand did not believe that anyone could make a commercial movie on the subject of over-population. He wanted Krishna to remake one of his earlier commercial Hindi successes in English.

In the six weeks or so that Krishna Shah was in India he met all sorts of friends. Sunil Dutt threw a homecoming party for him; Dev Anand warmly entertained him. And the fascinating, larger-than-life O.P. Ralhan, an excellent comic actor who’s also a producer-director of big, commercial and occasionally successful movies, even offered to finance him!

“O.P. can be a very persuasive guy to the extent that when he visited Hollywood he came to my office at the Sam Goldwyn Studios and my car, my secretary, my reading-room, all belong-

ed to him! I have always had a great affection for O.P. We corresponded regularly. When O.P. wanted some stunt-people for his movie *Paapi* I made the contacts for him. So when I came to India, O.P. came to see me and brought his Mercedes along and said: 'Krishna, this is your Mercedes; this is your office; whatever you need is yours; my friends, my home, anything! And if you need someone to finance you, I'll do that too.'"

Fame began to dog Krishna Shah.

Bombay Television was next to get to him. Krishna was interviewed "live" on Bombay TV and it made him a local star. "I was recognized on the streets. Very often, people'd come up to me and say: 'You're Krishna Shah, aren't you? I saw you on TV!' It was something totally new for me because though I've figured frequently in the American press and on T.V., nobody really bothers about it there.

"The love, the warmth, the recognition, sort of gripped me. I'd missed this totally in Hollywood. In Hollywood when you have success, you have power. No love. No warmth.

"If you have success and a fat bank balance, you're a celebrity in Hollywood. Over here you're more than a mere celebrity. You're almost a deity.

"Being a success in Hollywood and a success in India are two different things. In Hollywood if you're a success it doesn't mean that you have all the privileges too. It means that you can get more, with more cash. It's purely *dollar power*.

"Here, if you're a success it's a recognition factor. People here want to touch you, to feel you if you're real. They want your *darshan*. They want to shake hands with you or just be with you, merely because you're someone. You're known. You're a celebrity. All this gives you a tremendous sense of *presence*."

It was, as Krishna Shah termed it, a "totally mind-boggling experience." He had committed himself by now to do a picture-

in India, and as magic day piled upon magic day, the commitment grew into a determination.

But what picture was he to do?

Where was the script?

Krishna Shah had a script of sorts called *Johannesburg Jigsaw*. It was a story about a group of desperadoes invited to an island in the Caribbean by a South African character—a kind of gentleman crook—Sir John, who owns the island. It's all about how these desperadoes who come from all over the world get involved in a death-hunt for the world's most fabulous ruby which is in the possession of Sir John.

He'd written it for a film to be done on a Jamaican island, or in South Africa where he'd been for some years. But the script was some years old. This was mid-1976, Krishna Shah's first visit to India after fourteen years. *Johannesburg Jigsaw* just wouldn't do as it was. But it was a starting point, and Krishna began, from this point onward, thinking about it, constantly mentally revising and updating it, with the notion that he'd get down to this particular script, use it as a base for a 1976, up-to-date movie that could be made in two versions, in the Hindi language for the local market and in English for the international market.

Simultaneously, Krishna hired a person to draw up the preliminary production budgets for him. When this was ready Krishna saw that a really huge amount of money was involved. But the decision to do a Hollywood movie in India was taken. There was no backing out now. He went ahead on what locations to select, what Indian and what international stars to choose, and so forth.

Once the budget was made both Krishna and Bhupendra knew they really needed very big financial backing on this project. Bhupendra was, of course, totally charmed by the flamboyant Gulshan Rai, and initially, even Krishna was under his spell. They'd talk at length about the projected venture and

well, anyway, let Krishna narrate this in his own words:

"Now Gulshan, who is a very filmic and flamboyant character had me in his grip. I was both amazed and charmed by his character. His house, the food he'd lay out for me every evening, everything about him charmed me!

"He'd say, 'Yes, I'm doing a picture with you Krishna,' and then he'd give me all kinds of big stories, but he wouldn't be specific, he wouldn't come down to the nitty-gritty.

"Gulshan asked me what stars I was thinking about for my movie. I had seen Gulshan's *Deewaar* and I'd liked Amitabh. I thought Amitabh would be ideal for my picture because of his personality. Right from the outset my idea was to make a commercial movie."

Krishna Shah's first brush with the commercial Hindi cinema or rather, with the Indian film industry centred at Follywood (Bombay) was, to use Krishna's own phrase "mind-boggling."

"'My God!' I'd say to myself," Krishna Shah exclaimed. "Five hundred films a year, so many technical facilities, well-equipped studios, good cinema halls, and yet Indian cinema is a joke in world cinema. And that joke, which I used to believe was a joke, was a joke no longer. Because here in India, Indian cinema works!

"I think it is due to an inborn pride in me at being an Indian. I don't know. But there it was and I asked myself, 'Why not do a picture here, a totally commercial, box-office oriented picture, using the best box-office ingredients available here?'"

So he decided to go for established box-office stars; not off-beat or stage artistes, but stars who "sell" with the distributors and exhibitors. He decided on two versions—the Hindi version to have all the usual box-office ingredients demanded by the distributors and the exhibitors for the Indian market, and the overseas version to be shaped as a box-office product as demanded by the international market.

During the nightly sessions at Gulshan Rai's home, the brothers Bhupendra and Krishna had met a short, dapper and soft-spoken man named Suresh Shah (no relative). A big industrialist, Suresh Shah had seen *Rivals* and loved it. He'd mentioned to Bhupendra (who was already doing business for years with Suresh Shah in motor parts) that he'd like to finance Krishna. But Bhupendra had paid no heed to Suresh's soft-spoken suggestion. He was, even then, completely under Gulshan Rai's magic spell.

But things were moving too fast and neither time, nor tide, nor Krishna Shah were in a mood to wait for any man to take his own time in making up his mind.

Right then, aside from showman Gulshan Rai who kept putting off the fateful decision, there was another distributor who also, after seeing *Rivals*, wanted to finance Krishna Shah on the Indo-American project. He kept pestering both brothers daily, but they made discreet enquiries and found that the person's resources just weren't big enough to shoulder such a venture.

"Bhupendra wanted only Gulshan Rai to finance this project," Krishna said to me. "But by then I didn't care. I told Bhupendra: 'I have a deadline, on such-and-such date I'm going to sign my finance, no matter who he is. How about Suresh Shah? Let's go see him!'"

The brothers called on Suresh Shah. Suresh is the youngest of the three Shah brothers of the Ramon Group. While the other two are staunch businessmen, Suresh has a taste for flamboyance. Very abrupt and laconic in manner, he makes instant decisions.

Looking back on the *Shalimar* adventure now, Krishna Shah says: "I could not have asked for a better producer than him. He's been like a rock behind *Shalimar*, always ready to help out in any crisis. And yet he is so humble that I have to impose credit on him! The absolute trust he put in me is so touching that sometimes I feel that but for his confidence in me,

Shalimar would probably have never been made. Our relationship was such that we'd always protect each other and together we would protect Shalimar. However, the only thing about Suresh was that he never interfered with my work and I never interfered with his!"

They told Suresh frankly that they were negotiating with Gulshan Rai right then, that Gulshan was elder brother Bhupendra's first choice because they were close friends and that they had reached a stage of first come, first served.

As a matter of fact, Gulshan Rai had by then been taken to Krishna Shah to the home of film star Amitabh Bachchan, just two days before Bhupendra's big party.

At that meeting Krishna Shah gave Amit a 16 mm print and a print of *Rivals*. The star saw the movie and Krishna said: "He [Amit] said alright, he'd act in my picture and he'd give me whatever dates I needed for my shooting in a stretch. He said he was sort of privileged to be acting in my movie."

That decision behind him, Krishna next turned his attention to the casting of the leading-lady.

The first leading-lady who came to mind was Parveen Babi. Krishna Shah had seen her in a brief appearance in *Deewana* and then met her at one of those innumerable movie parties to which he was always being invited.

"I thought Parveen would be okay for the role of Sharda in my script," Krishna said. "I was not looking for great actors or actresses. I was looking for personalities whom I could mould to my requirements....I mean, the type of overly emotional acting seen in Indian movies is not acceptable back in America or anywhere in the West. So I was looking for personalities and I thought Parveen had terrific personality."

The talk that day between the two brothers and Suresh Shah was strictly preliminary. The former were trying to hedge their bet on Gulshan Rai, trying to create a safety-factor.

back on, in case the flamboyant showman continued to play hard to get.

Then came that memorable party, hosted by Bhupendra Shah. A fateful party, as it turned out, because at that party *Shalimar* found its financier.

THE FATEFUL PARTY

It was a Tuesday night.

And it was a very typical, very loud, very brash, high-society party.

Remember: those were the days of Indira Gandhi's Emergency when a host of new and powerful kings ruled in different parts of the sprawling subcontinent, each local chieftain throned by virtue of total allegiance to the Great Lady. The uncrowned king of Bombay at that time was the colourful Rajni Patel.

"His being at Bhupendra's party," Krishna Shah chuckled, "kind of put the *seal of approval* on it!"

Quite a few businessmen, some film stars, financiers and socialites were also at the party with their retinue.

"It was a crucial party," Krishna recalls. "Bhupendra had organized it very meticulously. It was the moment of decision, the occasion for me to make up my mind. At the end of that party I was to finally know whom I was going to clinch my finance deal with.

"It was strange and memorable! God, the power Rajni Patel wielded at that time! He was like a mini-god! Bhupendra and Mani Mistri [Krishna's Personal Secretary and later his P.R.O.] were on tenterhooks about him—nothing should offend him—and here I was going on asking him all sorts of funny questions like, how does it feel to be so powerful? Look at all these people, they're all afraid of you!—and he'd smile.

"Some time during this party I asked Gulshan Rai *point-blank*:

“Are you going to finance my picture or not?” He was high and I thought this was the best time to hear the truth from him. He replied: ‘Yes, Krishna. But far too much money is needed for this project. We’ll see.’

“Suresh Shah was also at this party. Suresh enjoys people who drink and when he drinks, he drinks well. He loves people drinking with him, but I don’t drink! Anyway, he poured a Scotch for me and I had two or three drinks with him without getting high. By then we’d become very friendly.

“We were drinking and chatting and suddenly Suresh Shah took a sheet of paper out of his pocket—it was a contract, all typed out! He’d specified in writing that he’d put up the enormous amount of money needed for my project, and he’d already signed the document himself! It was a businessman’s pure gambling instinct—and it paid off. I was hooked!

“Suresh Shah and Gulshan Rai have always been friendly competitors and both of them like to talk about their individual wealth in crores. Suresh excitedly showed Gulshan that typed and signed contract saying: ‘Krishna has just decided to do his picture with me!’

“Gulshan turned pale. I tried to pacify him by saying that if he so desired both of them could join hands and jointly finance the picture. Of course I knew it wouldn’t work out that way, because both Gulshan and Suresh are loners by nature and instinct. On a project as big as this, neither would like to share either the cash or the credit.”

Gulshan Rai took the reversal well. In his heart of hearts surely he must have felt that Suresh Shah would not live up to his commitment and that the project would again fall back into his own lap! He was wrong, however; absolutely wrong.

Krishna Shah and Gulshan Rai continued to meet as frequently as before. “I was a visitor at Gulshan’s house every night,” Krishna recalls. “And every night Gulshan would drink and become very genial and expansive. Once, he told me that I

should do a movie in two languages and have Yash Chopra as my co-director on the Hindi version. The real thing is that Gulshan was scared to let go of Yash. And he didn't believe that a foreigner could direct a Hindi film. But I refused point-blank saying: 'My God, I wouldn't let such a thing happen! Yash is a great director in his own right and I'd be embarrassed to have him as a co-director! I personally respect him a great deal!'

"Actually, what Gulshan said, if you read between the lines, disturbed me a great deal. I felt it meant that he couldn't trust me to direct a movie on my own. By God, I can write a whole book on the events of that fateful party!"

THE CASTING

"Amitabh Bachchan had told me that before I cast anybody I should meet Zeenat Aman. At that time—it was my first short visit to India—I'd left my wife Diane back home in the States and she was having back trouble and my son, Judd, too wasn't keeping well. Diane was ringing me up frequently and asking me to come home; and I'd already fixed the date to go back to America.

"Then two days before I left India, Amitabh fixed up a meeting for me with Zeenat. The meeting was set for a few hours before I caught my plane to New York. We met and something happened. She's a real turn-on! Zeenat has certain vibrations, a sort of aura about her which hit me at once.

"I still remember, she was sitting in a black dress. The lighting in the room was subdued. This was about nine in the evening. We sat together and talked and talked—about cinema and everything, and I told her that I had exactly thirty minutes to make up my mind about her, that I was on my way to the airport to catch the flight to New York.

"There was something magical, some vibrations which this girl imparted, that got to me. I told her there and then that the role was hers, and she accepted it very graciously."

Let me take you all back a little...

I myself met Krishna Shah probably two or three days after

he arrived in town—the first visit. Like practically every other Bombayman who buys *The Times of India* I too had read that half-pager on him. And a couple of days later I got a phone call from Bhupendra Shah whom I'd met through none other than showman Gulshan Rai, who happens to be a very dear friend of mine.

"Come along to the Taj and meet my brother," Bhupendra had said.

"Who's that?" I growled.

"He's a famous Hollywood director," Bhupendra said with a flourish. "You must have read about him a couple of days ago in the *Sunday Times*—name of Krishna Shah!"

Bhupendra's like that, great guy to know.

Ever since the day I'd met Krishna Shah in the Sea Lounge of the Taj I'd been struck by one important quality he has—his drive, his tenacity and resulting from this, his promptitude in making decisions. It is Krishna Shah's basic nature to keep the reins of control tightly in his own hands—whether the reins of control be on any ordinary, everyday situation, or on a major, Indo-U.S. co-production.

I was pretty close to Krishna Shah right from that day on to the end of the *Shalimar* adventure, and all along, it was *he* who made the decisions, not the other men or women. He said so to me too, in so many words.

"Every actor or actress knew it was my choice, not theirs," he said emphatically. "The whole movie-industry in Bombay knew this and I kept it that way to the end. Before I could meet any of my actors I knew that the fever to work with me had got to them.

"I wasn't getting my finance on the names of any stars. I was getting my finance on my own merit."

I think Zeenat Aman sensed this quality in Krishna Shah right from the first meeting with him, and that's the reason why they got along so famously together. Zeenat has a tremendous

sense of energy—she is, as Krishna Shah says, an I Ching personality. She got to the essence of the man right away, and the rapport was effortless.

And it is exactly here that the middle-aged though still very glamorous Italian actress-turned-photographer, Gina Lollobrigida, went wrong. She tried, disastrously, to take the initiative away from Krishna Shah, and *kaput* went a glorious comeback vehicle for her.

But I am running ahead. . .

The casting of *Shalimar* had plenty of thorns strewn in its path.

Gulshan Rai, who continued to be Krishna Shah's advisor, told the America-returned director not to make a movie combining Indian and Western stars, because nobody in India would buy the picture—and, by the same token, nobody abroad would buy it either! Gulshan Rai's contention was that Indian male stars and Western female stars do not go together.

At this stage Krishna Shah had not completely finished his re-write of the script and at one point he even considered having a well-known black actress like Diana Ross in the movie. He thought it would be a great idea.

"But," smiled Krishna, "the others wouldn't listen! They thought the idea absurd! And now I realize it would be so, because I find that Indians are more colour-conscious than Americans! If you read the matrimonial columns you'll know everybody wants a fair-skinned bride!"

Anyway, Krishna had cast his leading Indian stars, Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman. The script was still in a fluid state, and Krishna knew that he was going to America not merely because his wife Diane and son Judd were ill, but because he had to put the deal across to his prospective American investors.

"They [the American investors] were not difficult," Krishna Shah said. "They promised me whatever I required to make this picture. This co-production deal was a very unique kind of deal—I'd even go to the extent of calling it an *incestuous* deal, because it was done purely on relationships."

Krishna Shah had resolved the American end of the financing too. With *The River Niger* going for him, he was listed among the currently more successful film-directors in America. It made it that much easier to shop around for his technicians, too.

But Krishna Shah didn't have his key man, and he'd reached a stage where he needed him very, very badly indeed.

And this man was his Executive Producer.

Krishna Shah needed the right man for this very crucial assignment, because right then he was doing not only what a director is supposed to do during the setting-up of a project, he was doing all that a producer has to do as well.

Then Krishna Shah found his man.

ENTER RANVEER SINGH

His name is Ranveer Singh, though nobody really calls him that—they all call him Ronnie Singh.

Tall, slim and easy-going, Ronnie Singh like Krishna Shah, is an expatriate Indian living in London and New York, with as long and variegated a career in films.

Ranveer Singh never dreamed he'd become, of all things, a film-maker. Coming from an Army family, his original ambition was to make it as a pilot. After initial flying in India, Ronnie went over to England for advanced air training, crashed his plane and smashed up his body. Declared medically unfit for flying, he chucked up flying altogether and resigned.

At twenty-two years he didn't know what the hell to do with his life. He'd been in hospital a long while. In that time, heavily swathed in bandages, he did little else but read books and watch television. Naturally, television was the inspiration for films and in no time at all Ronnie became a typical British *filmwallah*. He gained editing experience, became an Assistant Director and wrote scripts.

Among the pictures Ronnie worked on as an assistant was one of Peter Sellers' early films from which time, incidentally, Peter and Ronnie became good friends. "Peter used to make fun of my Indian accent!" Ronnie grinned. "And eventually, he used it as a laugh gimmick in *The Millionairess*."

In 1960-61 the co-production bug bit him and he got involved in the making of *Elephant River*, first in India and later in Ceylon,

based on his own script.

Though *Elephant River* may never be listed in any books when the history of cinema is written, it was for Ranveer Singh an interesting and absorbing experience because, for the first time, it gave him an insight into how things go when people of different nationalities work closely together for any length of time. The making of that film was also a tremendous experience because he went in as an Assistant Director and became its Production Controller.

It was when Ranveer Singh got involved in a project in America titled *Rock Spring* (1974-75) that he met Krishna Shah again. They used to meet now and then, whenever Ronnie went out to California or whenever Krishna came up to New York. *Like Ronnie, Krishna too had been bitten by the same bug—he too wanted to do something in India!*

Then Krishna Shah made *The River Niger*. It became a big success and he was signed up for other pictures. In the meantime, his father fell ill in India and Krishna, who had not been home for fourteen years, felt the strong emotional pull to visit the home folks again.

Several strands of fate were moving concurrently and rapidly now, and they were moving the two major characters of the *Shalimar* adventure—Krishna Shah and Ranveer Singh—inexorably towards each other and to India.

The time was ripe.

BUREAUCRACY—THE BIGGEST HASSLE

For his choice of Executive Producer, it was for Krishna Shah, a toss-up between two people—Ranveer Singh or Brad Arronson, Krishna's Associate Producer in America on *The River Niger*.

"Brad is a very cool kind of character," Krishna told me. "He has a beard like Santa Claus and he's a soothing man to have around. I thought he'd be terrific on this project and even discussed the deal with him. But Brad's greatest difficulty is that he can't speak or understand Hindi. However he was eager to work in India and I thought that despite the Hindi handicap, Brad would be just fantastic.

"It put me in a dilemma—whom to take, Brad or Ronnie? I gave the script to Ronnie. He read it and loved it. He gave me his reactions to it and suggested we put in more detailed work on the budget. When I went to meet my investors I took Ronnie along with me."

The opposition in India to Ronnie Singh, however, was tremendous and a lesser man than Krishna Shah would have been influenced by it. "My recruitment of Ronnie Singh was done over the heads of everybody who turned thumbs-down on him. Ronnie had been through hell then. Ten years ago he'd tried his hand at film-making and failed and a few years of knocking at doors here had disheartened him and he'd gone back to America.

"When I recruited him many people around me came up with stories against Ronnie that they'd heard. *Suresh was disturbed*

stretch, and you'll have your money."

And it was only after producing the legal contracts with Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman that they could get credit for hiring equipment in London. With this, plus the Government's official clearance of the script and Suresh Shah's bank guarantee for the entire Indian financing, it was enough to secure the full financing and other credit facilities from the West.

"After all these procedures were over," Ronnie Singh continued, "I came back again to the officials and said: 'Now, this is the financial aspect of our project. This amount will come from the foreign investors; this amount will come from the Indian investors; these are the sales potentials and so forth.'"

"I gave them a complete memorandum on the infinite benefits that would accrue to our country out of such a co-production. They saw its possibilities and approved it."

By the time they'd finished all this, it was the end of March 1977. Through it all, Suresh Shah was standing like a rock behind both Krishna Shah and Ronnie Singh. Because he had put up the completion bond, when Suresh Shah was in London he had to go along to the insurance company and to the bankers—who made enquiries through the Indian High Commission about the financial status and stability of the Ramon House group. Only when they were satisfied about the high-degree solvency of the party did they accept Suresh Shah's completion bond.

Meanwhile, in India, a major political upheaval took place, when in 1977 the newly-formed coalition of political parties combining under the collective label of the Janata Party overthrew Indira Gandhi and her Emergency regime.

"When the new group of persons took over," Ronnie Singh continued, "I met H.M. Patel, L. K. Advani, and others and they were all very progressive in their thinking and viewed things in a long-range perspective. They went all out to help

us. But though, as a whole, the Government was very helpful, we had lots of hassles and headaches with people at the lower bureaucratic level, who were trained to go by the book, and were not tuned to take initiatives and independent decisions."

For the record, Krishna Shah wanted to begin shooting *Shalimar* in May 1977 while Ronnie Singh had come in on the project about six months earlier, at the end of October 1976.

In all, therefore, they had six months for pre-production planning, but Ronnie Singh was positive that six or seven months would not suffice. So they took a decision to delay the shooting—from May 1977 until after the monsoons (June through August)—a wise decision as it later turned out.

The eve of Krishna's second coming to India from America drew near; and the tension mounted. A lot of correspondence was going back and forth between Diane (Krishna's wife in New York) and Mani Mistri (Krishna's Personal Assistant in Bombay) about the apartment, the school for Judd, the food and the drinking water, how it would have to be boiled and things like that!

When Krishna, Diane and Judd got back to Bombay, the apartment wasn't ready and they stayed at the Taj. Krishna Shah's mother drove down to the Taj to meet them. It was the first time the Indian mother-in-law was meeting the American daughter-in-law.

"My mother came to the Taj," Krishna told me. "And she and Diane talked. My mother doesn't know English, yet they talked for two hours! Then they both cried and it was a very touching moment. They exchanged gifts. Diane gave my mother a Star of David, one that had been given her by her mother."

Ronnie was down with flu in the States and at this time Krishna was wearing himself ragged doing everything by himself. There was staff to be recruited; the office to be started; budget-

breakdowns to be made; locations to be scouted—and a million other things to do.

To add to Krishna's headaches, in the very first month of their arrival in India, Diane fell ill. Ronnie arrived in Bombay and was promptly despatched to South India to scout locations.

"The big problem was locations. I wasn't sure where to shoot," Krishna said. "All the time I was collecting information about various locations and also setting up the office, recruiting personnel. Mani Mistri and I had to see to simply everything! Even ordinary things like stationery, the names of companies; the advance work on this film was laborious and detailed. We took an almost religious care in picking our personnel.

"Mani Mistri was the only person with me then. Ronnie had left for South India and we were operating out of two small cabins on the ground floor of Ramon House, which simply wasn't enough! There were constant meetings with Suresh and Bhupendra. In the end Suresh gave us the entire top floor of Ramon Building, the penthouse suite, and we turned it into our office and put the board, LAXMI PRODUCTIONS outside."

Things had come into shape at last.

They now had a luxurious, fully air-conditioned complex of offices in a building in the heart of the fashionable downtown business district of Bombay known as Churchgate Reclamation.

They had recruited production staff, the art director, and sundry office workers. They had by then also decided to do the shooting entirely in South India because of the Maharajah of Mysore's fabulous palace there. Krishna Shah had flown south along with Art Director Ram Yedekar and taken hundreds of photographs, pin-pointing the various locations.

At this stage, the man who figured most prominently in putting flesh-and-blood into the *Shalimar* project, via a series of

elaborate and creatively conceived legal contracts and arrangements, was internationally famous solicitor, Atul Munim.

The co-production contracts had been signed. The title *Shalimar* had been given to the script. Two of the top stars of the commercial Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman, had agreed to star in the film. Talk had begun in terms of signing up Gina Lollobrigida, Peter Ustinov, and John Saxon to fill the foreign casting.

It was time to announce the Big Deal to the press.

THE INTRIGUES FLARE UP

Both Krishna Shah and Suresh Shah set the date for the press conference to announce *Shalimar* in the last week of November 1976.

All this time, despite the lionizing, despite the wining and dining, a quiet undercurrent of hostility and intrigue was building up invisibly against the brash America-returned young Indian, on the home front.

Big film-makers (all of whom suffer from deep-rooted insecurities) began suddenly to feel peeved, then jealous, then finally downright hostile to this young unknown-in-India director who was planning to snatch the limelight away from them with a project so big that none of them were capable of planning on their own.

Barriers were being erected to keep Krishna Shah out, and obstacles being secretly placed in his way to make the going very, very tough for him, indeed.

And the first big bombshell was due to explode on the eve of that first memorable press conference. Krishna Shah tells it vividly:

"In November, after scouting locations, I met Amitabh about the shooting dates. It was a very cordial meeting and he showed interest in the film and all that, but all the same he made it clear to me that he had a problem with dates. He said: 'Let's work this out together.'

"So I sent Ronnie in to negotiate with Bunty [the star's

brother who handles the business for him] about the contract, and there's a problem about money. Suddenly Gulshan Rai also came up with a problem. Director-Producer Yash Chopra who is financed by Gulshan wanted to make *Kaala Patthar* with Amitabh in the lead and he wanted all of Amit's dates in May for himself.

"Now, I had come back to India on the commitment of these two stars, Amitabh and Zeenat. Zeenat was no problem. She had a sense of loyalty to me and she was also very protective about the *Shalimar* project. Any time she heard any rumours about it she'd ring me up. Actually, even on the day of the press conference she called me up and warned me that something was brewing...

"Coming back to Amitabh, having no other alternative I told Yash Chopra that since he wanted to shoot his *Kaala Patthar* in May, I would postpone my project to August or September. I had great respect for Yash and I'd always go personally to meet him.

"With me there is no protocol about who should visit whom and I'd go and see everybody myself. I even went to see Amitabh myself—and they misunderstand this in India. To them everything depends on who calls on whom! Well, anyway, I went to Yash's house to sort things out. Yash gave me an indication that he wanted to shoot in May and that he had already signed his foreign technicians and so forth. So I worked it out with him. Amitabh agreed to my postponing the project and we all shook hands over it.

"The following week Amitabh was shooting one night at a hotel in Juhu. I went there and in the presence of both Gulshan Rai and Amitabh I told Yash on the phone that I was postponing my shooting to September 1977 so as to be able to take Amitabh, but that I could not shoot intermittently, as they are accustomed to in India. I'd need all my dates at a stretch.

"Six days later we met Amitabh at the Holiday Inn in New York.

out a deal. The dates problem was solved, the money was fixed and Amitabh signed the contract and shook hands with Suresh and me. Both Amit and Zeenat had signed the letters of consent, which is as good as a legal contract in the Indian film industry, and had accepted their signing amounts.

"And the next day was the big press conference. . . ."

I remember that press conference vividly to this day.

It was at 6 P.M. at the Taj and I had persuaded Krishna Shah that the major announcements at the conference, aside from details about the co-production, would be that the main Indian stars signed for *Shalimar* were Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman.

"If you don't announce that, you have nothing!" I insisted. "The press isn't going to be happy with a few platitudes about co-productions! No! You must announce star names now!"

And I thought he'd do just that, blissfully unaware of the solid intrigues flaring up behind the scenes.

"I was going to do exactly as Bunny Reuben advised," Krishna Shah confessed later. "That actually was to be the highlight of the press conference—the names of Amitabh Bachchan and Zeenat Aman.

"Well, the press had all arrived. It was a good turn-out. We were almost ready to begin the formal speeches. Suresh was there. Ronnie was there. Bhupendra was there. I was about to stand up and take the mike to begin speaking when a Taj waiter came up from behind and whispered in my ear that I was wanted on the telephone.

"I hurried outside into the lobby and took up the receiver. Amitabh's brother, Bunty, was on the line. He told me I must see Yash Chopra at once. He vaguely mentioned something^o about Yash wanting some dates of Amitabh in September. I flared up. 'Why the hell should I see Yash?' I told Bunty. 'Let

him come and see me! I already have all my dates with Anshu tabh!" [By now apparently Krishna had concurred in fact in the subtleties of Indian filmland's protocol about who tells to whom!]

"Bunty hemmed and hawed and again repeated that I should work it out with Yash. I put down the phone. In that moment I instantaneously decided not to announce Anshu's name until this new development was cleared.

"It was a great blow to me, naturally, this bombshell coming to me like this, moments before I'd begun to address the press. The tension built up fast and when I went back and began to speak, I did something I'd never done before: I stumbled while speaking!

"Naturally, I couldn't announce Anshu's name and I had to skirt a lot of grueling questions. As a result I got a bad image with the press, of a man who doesn't know what he's up to. It was a horrible press conference and I made a fool of myself because I'd called the press to make a major announcement, and I had nothing to announce."

As he went through his speech, Krishna Shah's closest workers—Mani Mistri, Kenny Kocher, and Prakash Singh—all grew aware that something was seriously amiss. Krishna, they got through that press conference. After a few days they had a meeting. It was the beginning of the formation of what Krishna Shah describes as his "Inner Core," where he kept everything and told nothing.

"From that moment on," Krishna continued, "he really toughened us up. Now my 'Inner Core' knew everything. He sent a message to Yash Chopra and he wouldn't give up the message. We thought this ridiculous! I thought he was giving me one more chance.

"Actually, there's no doubt that we could have had any power we wanted. That wasn't the worry. The worry was to make a dramatic switch at that late stage—just the night before the

lot of problems were bound to crop up. Dharmendra was my only other choice, and even that wasn't a safe bet because we didn't have the slightest idea whether Dharam was available, and also there would be a language problem with him.

"It was a very existential moment and in that existential moment if you are cut off from that one thing you depend solidly on, if you are cut off and you can stay afloat, on your own, even for two days, you have it made. That was the existential moment for me, and I said to myself: 'Do I need any of these masala actors to make this movie? Do I take this shit from them or not?' I brooded over it, and suddenly I became aware that I'd always been a cowboy, a maverick.

"Yash Chopra was very much in the driver's seat at that moment, and Amitabh was being put under pressure from all directions, from Yash Chopra, from Gulshan Rai, from Salim-Javed, everybody! They must have told him: 'Who the hell do you think you are? We make your career and you give him your dates at a stretch, even in September?'

"Poor Amit, the guy didn't know how to cope with the situation! So they used Ranveer Singh as their scapegoat. They called him a good-for-nothing who couldn't do even his own films! It wasn't Amitabh who was solely responsible, but the people around him. With pressures like this, naturally Amitabh got panicky. He has to live with his camp. He couldn't afford to pin his faith on me.

"All along Gulshan Rai knew that Amit was being pressurized, so I met Gulshan and talked to him about it. I said: 'Gulshan, what shit is this?' He told me to go and talk it over with Amitabh. They had, of course, prepared Amitabh in advance for this. *By that time Amitabh too had the impertinence to believe that he had me where he wanted me, that he had me by the short and curly, and that I couldn't make the film without him!*

"I arranged to meet him in the presence of Yash Chopra. I wanted an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation on this thing once

and for all."

This crucial meeting was held at Yash Chopra's office. Those present were—aside from Yash Chopra—Krishna Shah, Bhupendra Shah, Amitabh Bachchan, and his brother, Bunty.

"One thing... according to the American system," Krishna continued, "one director is expected to respect another to the utmost. Even if you have your differences with another director, you never avoid him. It's a kind of protocol. If I meet any director I go out of my way to shake hands with him and if he ever calls me up I'd never dodge his phone call. If another director calls me up, it doesn't matter whether he's a small director or a big director, I have to respect him. This is part of the American system."

The entire subsequent conversation went something like this: Krishna asks Amit: "What's this about taking away some of my dates in September?"

Amitabh drawls: "Aaah... yes..."

Yash quickly intervenes, saying: "Look Krishna, I have to have him for ten days, just ten days per month for *Kaala Patthar*. I need ten days in September. Amit may have given you his dates, but I haven't agreed to those dates!"

Krishna turns around to Amitabh to ask what he has to say. He says: "Krishna, yes, I want to do a picture with you."

Krishna says: "*No, tell me right now what your decision is.*"

Amitabh replies: "*I don't know.*"

Krishna: "*Why don't you make up your mind? What is your decision?*"

And the actor would ~~not~~ make a decision! Krishna takes a long pause and says: "Amitabh, I've made my decision. I hereby release you from your contract."

There follows a long and awkward pause where everyone is busy avoiding everyone else's eyes. Krishna stands up and turning to Yash Chopra says: "Congratulations, Yash. You've got a terrific actor."

And he walks out.

Bunty runs after Krishna, protesting: "Krishna, what're you doing? I thought we had a deal! I mean, we've taken your money and everything!"

Krishna says: "Bunty, in Hollywood even top actors seek me out to work with them. I don't run after actors. I believe in Amitabh's talent and I thought I could project it in the international market. That's all."

Reflecting upon the entire affair, Krishna Shah concluded by saying: "Amitabh had mentioned to me earlier: 'Krishna, I can't do anything. They're all putting terrific pressure on me!' *A man that talented, if he doesn't have the guts to make his own decisions, who can help him?* I can't. Bunty knew this and he said he'd call me back again. But I said: 'No, we'll be friends, but as far as I'm concerned, we're not working together now. The contract is broken.'

"Mind you, this wasn't a victory for me; neither was it a game. It was just the way things were."

The day after this episode Krishna Shah called on his leading lady at her residence. Zeenat and her mother, Mrs. Heinz, were both there.

Jocularly, Krishna remarked: "Zeenat, you were introduced to me by Amitabh. Now that Amit's out, are you out too?"

And she replied: "I'm always with you, Krishna."

"This is what makes Zeenat Aman such a wonderful person," Krishna Shah remarked contemplatively. "Her attitude to all her major directors is: *whatever you say*. She would not only give you that power, she would surrender herself to you genuinely on the professional level."

AFTER AMITABH—WHO?

They had a film, two films actually, all ready to go—and no leading-man!

On the rebound, Krishna Shah began to think in terms of replacing Amitabh Bachchan with an internationally famous star; Clint Eastwood and James Caan were among the names in active consideration for a while, but they dropped the idea when they tried to imagine these actors singing Hindi songs!

Increasingly, Suresh Shah was pressurizing Krishna to take Dharmendra; and one day, having made up their minds, Krishna Shah went along and met him.

"Diane had met Dharam previously, at the *Sholay* jubilee party, and she had a good feeling about him. I had had doubts earlier, but once I met Dharam at his penthouse I forgot everything else. We sat and discussed everything but the movie! And all the while he was charm personified! My story in *Shallmar* was about an amateur caught up in a net of professionals and I thought I'd rewrite the script for Dharam. I outlined all my do's and don'ts to him—he agreed to all of them.

"I warned him it would be very difficult for him. He'd be the joke of the year and the people around him'd poke fun at him! I told him that he'd have to repose full faith in me, and he did it! He even did things like losing weight for this movie and taking on three different English diction coaches, and conformed to all my demands!"

The same thing that had worked for Krishna Shah in the case

of Zeenat worked for him in the case of Dharmendra—his intuition. The moment they met, Krishna Shah's mind got busy with whether the American audiences would accept an actor who couldn't speak English properly, yet his intuition told him—yes, he will be!

Accordingly, Krishna went to work in dead earnest to set the script in shape for Dharmendra. He reworked the role using the actor's imperfect English diction as an asset, as a part of the character. Krishna, strangely enough, had traced strains of Americanese in Dharam's English speech! How? It seems Dharmendra told him he'd been working for some Americans as a car mechanic long before joining films, and that's how he'd picked it up!

"I decided I'd use Dharmendra's speech as-is—beautifully!" Krishna exclaimed. "Once before, I remember I'd gone by my intuition. I'd done my play *Sponono* on Broadway and I'd picked up a young actor for it because of his personality, because my intuition told me he'd be a good bet.

"He was nothing when I took him on but I put him through hell and finally turned him into a Broadway kind of star. I had acting sessions, speech sessions, diet sessions, all kinds of sessions with this kid. I worked with him day in and day out. People warned me against this—working so closely with artistes. I didn't heed them. This is my way of functioning. While working closely with the actors I'd get to know them intimately, and then something would happen. Something would click between us and many a time, in this way, I'd get better performances from these small-time actors than I got from professionals.

"The same thing happened with Dharam. His charm, his openness, and his honesty came through and I said to myself: 'I can use him beautifully for the English version.' I totally dropped the idea of going for an American actor for this role. It was Dharam or nobody for me now!"

Inevitably, the film-press, which got distorted rumours of the

Amitabh cancellation, went to town printing all kinds of concocted yarns about it.

"I didn't want any sort of publicity from the Amitabh episode," Krishna said. "What had happened had happened; I only wanted to forget the whole sordid affair. But the stories spread and people started talking, especially after a few drinks. Then the press carried contradictory stories—some said I'd dropped Amit, others said Amit dropped me. I ignored them all. But *Film-Mirror* [a Delhi film magazine] went too far when they printed a story, the gist of which was that Amitabh had demanded an enormous sum of money from me, and was blackmailing me, so I'd refused and therefore he'd walked out. This was too far out! So I wrote to them clarifying the matter and they published the letter."

Between January and March 1977 Krishna Shah had finished the casting of his film and he planned to shoot in September. He'd already had two or three script sessions with his cast and was busy re-writing the script in certain places.

O.P. Ralhan had a role in *Shalimar* right from the start, because they were good friends and Krishna had had the pugnacious actor-producer-director in mind when he'd first written the script. When Krishna formally offered O.P. the role, he agreed to act, but free of cost, as a token of their friendship.

At this stage a couple of interesting things happened.

The International Film Festival was held in New Delhi in January 1977 and both *Rivals* and *The River Niger* were exhibited there, garnering for Krishna Shah a lot of publicity and critical acclaim. There were celebrations, big parties and press conferences for him, as the man who was planning India's first major co-production with the United States of America.

Krishna Shah had persuaded Elia Kazan and two of his stars from *The River Niger*—James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson—to come to New Delhi and attend the Festival. Kazan went directly back to the States from Delhi and so did James Earl Jones. ^{1:1}

Cicely Tyson came down to Bombay. Krishna organized a *Meet the Press* party for Cicely at their penthouse suite atop Ramon House, and the dynamic young woman went over in a big way with the Bombay press.

After the Festival, Krishna Shah returned to Bombay and finalized his balance casting. He had seen Dr Sriram Lagoo—a noted actor-director of the Marathi stage and screen, currently appearing in Hindi movies—in *Imaan Dharam*, and fallen in love with his performance.

"I decided then and there to have him in my movie," Krishna declared. "So I created a part for him. I signed him up and I felt privileged to work with him."

"And Helen? Of course, I signed her up! That fantasy symbol of my boyhood days—I simply couldn't dream of making my first Hindi movie without her!" *Of course, eventually Krishna did have to set his boyhood fantasies aside and make Shalimar without Helen. How and why she dropped out is another of those incredibly fascinating stories of the Shalimar adventure.*

By now Krishna, who had long back realized the paramount importance of boning up on the form, structure, and stylization of the standard commercial Hindi movie, had begun to do his homework seriously. Knowing full well that he had taken on the challenge of making, in actuality not one, but two distinct movies in the by now well-publicized three-month period from 15 September 1977 to 15 December 1977; he started looking at Hindi films with a vengeance! He was going to Poona as often as possible, and seeing all kinds of Hindi films—at the Film Institute there as well as in the cinema halls, then analysing them and noting the audience reaction.

"Sometimes," Krishna remarked wryly, "I had even to see English-language films in order to retain my basic perspective on cinema and not be totally reshaped and remoulded by the fantasy world of the Hindi film and by its *masala*!"

While this was going on, on the creative side, on the business,

finance, and administrative sides, huge upheavals were the order of the day.

As the *Shalimar* momentum heated up, Suresh Shah found that money was flowing, quite literally. Like water. It was time to start balancing the budget by having some in-flow too in the shape of advances from distributors. But as yet, despite the sensational press coverage Krishna Shah and *Shalimar* were both getting, *no territories were being sold*.

For one thing, Suresh Shah, who had built up enormous faith in this project, wasn't prepared to sell his territories for anything less than the prices predetermined by him. For certain all-India distributors who have, over the years, been incessantly chary about buying Hindi films made by non-Hindi filmmakers were not in any hurry to come forward and buy the Indian territories for *Shalimar*.

So, what to do?

Ah, a grand gala *muhurat* (formal launching ceremony—*muhurat* it! That's how it's always done in the world of Bollywood. It's that's how Krishna Shah, Suresh Shah, Bhanu Singh and Bhupendra Shah decided to do it, too.

THE GALA MUHURAT: ENTER GINA LOLLOBRIGIDA

A *muhurat* ceremony is an institution peculiar to Hindi films. Outlasting many changes in the Indian film world it has survived for four decades.

A *muhurat* ceremony—for those American readers who are mystified by the phrase—is a function where lots of guests, (mostly distributors, of course, whom the producer intends to hook into buying his still-to-be-made movie) are invited to a studio to witness the taking of the first shot of the film.

The star of the film faces the camera.

One celebrity is invited to give the clap.

Another celebrity is invited to switch on the camera.

“Lights!”

“Start sound!”

“Camera!”

“Action!”

The celebrity now takes his/her position and holds the clapper-board in front of the star, giving a chance to the battery of press-photographers to click away. Then the clap is sounded, the camera switched on, the celebrity steps aside and the star speaks his or her lines.

It's over in a minute. Everybody starts clapping and the gate-crashers shoulder their way into the group photographs being taken, while other gate-crashers grab whatever refreshments they can lay their hands on.

The primary purpose of holding a *muhurat* of course is to attract as many buyers as possible to take up the various territorial rights of the movie, so that the distributors' instalments can start coming in, and the out-of-pocket investment is lowered.

Distributors however, are no suckers. They stopped being taken for a ride about fifteen years ago. But in spite of that, the tradition of the *muhurat* persists. I remember, during the war years (the forties) a producer once even held a *muhurat* without any film in the camera! It is not, of course, known how many distributors signed up to buy his film on the *muhurat* day.

However...

Once a *muhurat* was decided upon for *Shalimar*, several interesting points cropped up simultaneously.

What sort of a *muhurat* to plan? Spectacular, of course.

How to announce it?

Which celebrity to invite to give the clap?

Which celebrity to invite to switch on the camera?

Zeenat Aman, who had just returned from a two-month trip to England, Europe, and Hollywood, had spoken to the press about her meeting and becoming friendly with Warren Beatty (who had just made *Shampoo*) and James Coburn; and the first idea was to ask Zeenat to ring up Warren Beatty in the States and invite him to India "to give the clap!"

This idea soon gave way to other equally outlandish ones. Eventually, all the ideas fizzled out as the consensus settled more or less on... yes, Gina Lollobrigida!

I can see jaded eyebrows being raised in England and America at the name. Because, Gina over there, is a *has-been*. She stopped actively working in films after crossing the wrong side of forty and had begun to make a second career for herself as a free-lance photographer.

But in India, Gina was still a star (Gina herself hadn't the faintest idea about this until she came here and saw for herself first-hand). In India, Gina was still the girl in her twenties who

advertisements in the film-trade press was announced with a bang.

The various *Shalimar* ads had already started flooding full pages in the film-trade press and the *muhurat* ad came out a week in advance of the occasion. As the countdown to the *muhurat* day and the arrival of Gina Lollobrigida in Bombay began, the *Shalimar* fever, the *Shalimar* heat, the *Shalimar* hally-hoo, reached a crescendo...

6 a.m. 16 April 1977.

Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay, India.

They had kept a tight lid on the actual date and time of Gina's arrival. But Erville Menezes of the *Indian Express*, one of the few newspapermen who took the *Shalimar* project seriously right from the start was the one for whom they made a special concession. He was taken along to Santa Cruz Airport and promised the long ride back into town from the airport to the Taj Mahal Hotel with Gina, in the same car. During the car-ride, Erville was to interview Gina for the *Express*.

Listen to Krishna tell it: "Gina's plane was a few hours late. It came in at about 4 A.M. I'd never met Gina until then and vice versa, though she had heard about me through her agent in America. Ronnie had done all the talking with her till then.

"We got her out of Customs with a minimum of fuss and took her in a Mercedes straight to the Taj. Before, at 4 A.M., rode into town with her, along her specially reserved route. I was like how much money she was earning and what kind of life she was working with India and all of that. She was very nice and answered all the questions.

"And the next day 17 April 1977, was the *muhurat*."

From the moment Gina Lollobrigida stepped out of the Mercedes at Santa Cruz Airport, she was the centre of attention of innumerable photographers and reporters.

flowers thrust into her hands; to the moment she stepped into the huge, air-conditioned lounge of the Taj Intercontinental and was taken upstairs to her unbelievably luxurious penthouse duplex suite, where the courteous Taj management had kept a bottle of choice champagne on ice for her, the process of her eyes being opened to the incredible fact that here in India she was still considered a very, very big star indeed, began. (If one may be forgiven a snide comment, to use Krishna Shah's own phrase, the experience, for her, must surely have been mind-boggling.)

"Gina's picture *Come September* had been a big hit in India," Krishna Shah said. "Gina didn't know anything at all of this, of course. It was her first visit to India. But Erville Menezes told her about it during the course of their interview. That pleased and surprised her and she kept on asking Erville all sorts of questions about it, like: how much money the movie made here, things like that. Apparently, it now seems that she held a piece of that film but had been cheated out of her due moneys. Curiously enough, another film of Gina's called *That Splendid November* was running right then in Bombay, running very well indeed. That did it! It didn't take long for Gina to put two and two together and come up with twenty-two! She was rapidly convinced that she still was one hell of a big star!"

The following day, Krishna Shah along with Ronnie Singh, met Gina for lunch at the Taj. Gina was accompanied by her aide, Madame Lopez.

"That afternoon at lunch," Krishna Shah continued, "Gina met the Maharani Gayatri Devi at the Taj. They had met once before at a party in London. She was very happy to meet Gayatri Devi again, and must have felt it a real privilege to be seated next to a Maharani at lunch!

"At that same lunch, Gina told me all about Madam Marcos of the Philippines, who was not releasing the vast sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars due to her on her book.

She was in tears about the whole thing. She said she'd made a book and a documentary film on the Philippines with her own money, and now the Government was refusing to pay her! We seemed to reach a rapport at this lunch. I told her I'd put her in touch with a good international lawyer who'd help her get her money, and that was that. We ended lunch on a warm note."

It looked right then, like the beginning of a warm relationship. After lunch, it was time to go upstairs to Gina's suite again where the Indian stars of *Shalimar*, Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman, were due to pay a courtesy call on their colleague from abroad.

Filmfare photographer, Dhiraj Chawda, had been given time to do a special cover feature for *Filmfare* with pictures of Gina, Dharam, and Zeenat together. "She posed for the photographs with them without much ado or fuss," Krishna commented. "She was very obliging. We then left her to rest, and I returned to the Laxmi Productions Office with Dharam and Zeenat to rehearse the *muhurat* shot with them."

The *muhurat* had been scheduled for that same evening on a gala scale on the lawns of the prestigious Turf Club in Bombay.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOOBS

Krishna Shah finished rehearsing with both his principal Indian stars at 7 P.M.

Zeenat went home to change and get ready for the *muhurat*, while Dharmendra went along with Krishna to his apartment (which is very close to the Turf Club) where they both showered, dressed and went punctually, to the Turf Club.

Executive Producer Ronnie Singh had thought up a special kind of protocol for the *muhurat*. He wanted Gina Lollobrigida to make her grand entry on the Turf Club lawns only after the arrival of the principal Indian actress, Zeenat Aman. He felt that this would be an integral part of that world-famous Indian hospitality, that the hosts should be present and waiting with folded hands (the traditional Indian *namaste*) to receive the guest from abroad.

This, Ronnie felt, would be a nice little gesture on their part to please the famous Italian actress. Krishna Shah, apparently, knew nothing about it.

As it transpired eventually, things turned out differently from the way the kind-hearted Ronnie Singh had planned, and the evening proved to be a battle of the boobs between two highly professional actresses.

Naturally, to achieve the hospitality effect, it was necessary that [Ronnie Singh, who had been deputed to go to the Taj and accompany Gina to the Turf Club, should start from there about an hour later than the time given on the invitation cards,

to achieve the grand entry effect.

I didn't know about all this at the time. But the minutes ticked monotonously away and it began to look like this was going to be yet another of those elephantine affairs where nothing is done on schedule.

The first casualty of the evening was that the Chief Guest, India's great film-star Dilip Kumar, who had been invited to the ceremony to switch on the camera—it had been decided that Gina would give the clap thus keeping her in the forefront of the press photographers—and who had waited patiently for about an hour with his actress-wife Saira Banu, quietly took a side-exit and slipped away from the Turf Club.

It was quite some time before people realized that Dilip Kumar had left—and still no signs of either La Lollo or La Aman! By now I'd twigged it of course, that both leading-ladies were planning to out-manoeuvre the other as to who'd make the later entry!

To keep things moving, Krishna Shah (who was fretting and fuming inside and not showing it) started the religious ceremonies, the traditional *pūja* which invariably precedes the taking of the *muhurat* shot.

The press was present in full force. They had begun to snigger and make snide remarks about what seemed to be turning into a grand-scale fiasco. The press photographers, and there were dozens of them, were getting restless. The 8 mm movie team, which had been specially commissioned to make a short film of the entire ceremony, was getting restless, too.

By 9 P.M. even the most unperceptive had understood that both actresses were determined to come later than the other! Before the whole ceremony fell dead on their hands, Krishna Shah called for the invocation dance to commence. That kept things going for a while.

I'm sure Krishna by then must mentally have showered the choicest cuss-words on poor Ronnie's head—when at long last.

La Lollo made her grand entry, escorted by a sheepish-looking Ronnie Singh!

And Zeenat Aman still hadn't arrived! Round One, apparently, had gone to the Indian actress!

Listen to Krishna Shah tell it: "I do not know if Gina and Zeenat had planned a battle, a battle of the boobs. I can't speak for either of them, but I'm certain that it wasn't Zeenat's fault that she was late for the *muhurat*. [I have my own opinion about this.] *But I was going mad! I was really worked up!* Finally, we got the ceremony started before Zeenat's arrival.

"I really didn't know anything about this Gina-Zeenat rivalry. I can understand both of them wanting to look smashing, wanting to overshadow each other. I didn't know that Indian movie-stars, especially the girls, spend two hours on their make-up. I know now, of course, because when we were shooting the film in Bangalore, Zeenat used to wake up at 6 A.M. in order to be ready for her shot at 8 A.M.

"But I didn't know this on the day of the *muhurat* and that's why I let her off as late as 7 P. M. thinking that all she'd do is go home, shower, change and be at the Turf Club within half an hour! I wouldn't mind her coming a half hour late, because I planned to go late myself. But, my God—three hours late?

"God knows, Gina herself was late enough! And what a terrific entry she made! I've never in my life seen an entry like Gina's that night at the Turf Club! The crowd stood up, applauding, and the Indian press went crazy! The arc-lights were switched on as she came across the lawns and flashbulbs were flashing merrily everywhere. It reminded me for a split second about story-book Hollywood—it was that kind of a grand entrance."

Gina's gown—it was a sight for the Gods. There was nothing up front except her breasts and the cleft between them flaunted for all the world—especially the press photographers—to see.

The entire focus of the evening shifted to the famous Italian beauty who, that night, looked twice as desirable as women half her age.

It wasn't long—only moments—before Gina realized that Zeenat Aman hadn't arrived. She must have swallowed bile at the realization, because everyone who was anyone was crowding around her. Everyone except that young Indian actress with whom she was going to have to work. And La Aman, nowhere to be seen, would now have the last laugh.

I asked Zeenat Aman about this a few days later and she laughed me off saying: "Bunny, you're very naughty!" or words to that effect. But she merely laughed me off, she neither confirmed nor denied it, because I had told her: "*Zeenat, nothing you'll say will ever convince me that you didn't have a spy deputed by you to stand by and ring you up the moment Gina entered the Turf Club!*"

Zeenat Aman's apartment too isn't very far from the Turf Club, see? A mere ten-minute drive. And The Aman entered the grounds of the Turf Club precisely fifteen minutes after the Lollobrigida entry, stealing her thunder and ruining the Italian actress' evening for her!

And the Aman gown, a glittering, dazzling affair, also had nothing up front to hide those glorious, younger and infinitely more luscious breasts with that deep cleft between them.

And the photographers went mad all over again!

Let Krishna tell it now: "There were fifty newspapermen clustered around Gina, taking her pictures and I couldn't even get close enough to say *hello* to her. Fifteen minutes later Zeenat arrived. Immediately, as the entire press converged on her, leaving Gina high and dry for several nightmarish moments, Zeenat took me aside and apologized for being late. I told her to forget about it and taking her hand I hurried her up to the stage."

Krishna had worked out the speech he was going to give

beforehand. He was going to speak in Hindi and he'd taken a lot of trouble to rehearse his Hindi in advance. But the calamities of the *muhurat* and the magnificently late arrivals of both La Lollo and La Aman, drove all the prepared Hindi out of his mind!

So, Krishna took the mike and reverted automatically to English, speaking whatever came to his mind on the spur of the moment.

"I spoke anything that came to my mind about the fourteen years that I'd been away," Krishna Shah said. "It was a very fine moment for me as a film-maker and I'm sure that moment will remain with me for the rest of my life. *With this group of people I was feeling comfortably at home! I was on home-ground at last! I felt I had to communicate to these people, and they had to communicate to me.*"

The photographers had a field day.

Not one, but two magnificent pairs of boobs, one set Italian, the other Indian, and every man present there was trying his best to get himself photographed with either (or both) La Lollo or La Aman! Quite a few photographers must have made a packet out of the occasion.

After the speech, Krishna got Zeenat and Dharam positioned, with Gina holding the clapper-board and industrialist P.J. Patel stationed near the camera to switch it on (poor Dilip Kumar, everyone present pretended to forget that he'd done a graceful vanishing trick). The stars spoke their lines, Gina clapped, the cameras whirled and flashbulbs popped like mad. Dharam and Zeenat moved in for the clinch, the Kiss, and. . .

"Cut!" Krishna Shah let out a victorious, Tarzan-like yell that must have been heard all over Follywood, and the *muhurat* shot was taken.

Applause. Wild applause.

Someone announced that the Bar was open and in one mad rush the entire party surged towards the further side of the lawns.

The *muhurat* was over,—or it had just begun: it all depended on how fond you were of your Scotch that night. I think, for almost everybody present, the ceremony had really just begun.

Krishna Shah's problems began the following morning.

This man had weathered so many crises by now that he'd become immune to them! He even seemed to flourish on them! But at that moment, with *Shalimar* still not before the cameras, every crisis seemed like the end of the world, with half the wise guys in Follywood simply itching to say: "I told you so! The guy's a fake! *Shalimar* will never be made!"

God knows I'd heard such comments often enough from my innumerable colleagues and acquaintances in Follywood. But what happened in the three days (8-10 April 1977) that Gina Lollobrigida was in Bombay made it particularly bad.

Krishna Shah tells it best: "At the *muhurat* the kind of fanfare and reception Gina got, simply intoxicated her. *Psychologically, my estimation is that she simply could not bear this invocation of past glories, and she had to get out! She could not bear that sort of adulation because it was creating all sorts of problems for her now. This is the kind of thing that used to happen to her when she was in the nineteen to twenty five age group; when she was such a craze after Trapeze. This kind of thing had simply stopped happening to her in the past decade and a half.*

"When we came back from the *muhurat* she gave me a gift of her pictures taken when she was nineteen years old, and she started distributing the same autographed pictures to the press and to everyone else.

"The day after next, when I went to the Taj around 12 noon to meet Gina again, I found a major crisis had developed. Ronnie was nowhere to be found. It seems Gina had attended this party, thrown by the local Station Manager of Egypt-Air, by which she'd flown to India. He fancied her and suddenly

he'd turned into her spiritual and business advisor-cum-boy-friend.

"Well, apparently someone at that Egypt-Air Manager's party needed Gina that we had reduced her to the position of a clapper-girl, not realizing that to sound a clapper-board at a *muhurat* ceremony is a very prestigious thing. Only VIPs are asked to do it. Well, they sold her on the idea that all of us were making a fool of her. And she suddenly grew unhappy about the contract she'd signed with us. Now she wanted that contract back, to re-negotiate it! She asked Ronnie for it and Ronnie became panicky. That evening there was a party where Ronnie was supposed to escort her and she did not want him to escort her any more! She didn't even want to see Ronnie! So he simply did the vanishing trick!

"I didn't attend that party, either. The morning after the party Mani Mistri went to the Taj and I suddenly received a call from her saying: 'Krishna, come over right away! Gina's mad! She doesn't want the contract! She wants out! There's going to be a stink—she's called for a press conference on her own!'

"Now, this really shocked me because when we had arranged a press conference for her she had said that she didn't want one, because she had too many problems on her mind at the time. *And now, all of a sudden, Gina Lollobrigida herself had asked the Taj people to arrange a press conference for her!* She told them that we were trying to take advantage of her, that we were trying our best to stop her from meeting the press alone!

"We were absolutely amazed when the Taj personnel told us about it! So we virtually took over that press conference which she wanted. We organized it for her and we got many more of the top correspondents, the newspapermen and the wire-service boys than she'd have been able to get on her own.

"Gina actually wanted to announce at that press conference that she wasn't doing Shalimar.

"I went up to Gina's suite at the Taj, a good forty-five minutes before the scheduled time for the press conference and she let loose a tirade against Ronniel God, but she seemed really mad at Ronnie, and for no apparent reason! I spoke very quietly to her. I asked her what exactly she wanted. She said she wanted her contract back! I said: 'You'll get it back!' and I sent Mani Mistri to the office to fetch it. When she came back with it, I handed it to Gina. Just like a temperamental woman, she now said: 'I'm not in the movie now, and I feel embarrassed to tell this to the press.' I said: 'Don't worry, I'll tell them myself! I'll tell them you aren't in the picture and that you came here only for the *muhurat*.' I worked out and thoroughly discussed each and every move and strategy of here so that she was left with no other go but to allow me to handle the forthcoming conference in my own way.

"Once we reached this point, she broke down and burst into tears, and was talking wildly. She said: 'Krishna, you and I have are the only persons I love. I don't want to talk to Ronniel' So I said: 'Gina, you don't have to be in my picture if you don't want to. It's alright with me. Come, let's just break the news to the press. Or, you do the telling alone.' So she said that she break the news herself and then she burst into tears again.

"While all this was going on, Gina received two long-distance calls. One from the Philippines about her book and the other from Italy. This was her lawyer wanting to know what the hell she was doing in India, while he was heading for a nervous breakdown there! Then, suddenly, I realized what really was happening. Then, suddenly, I saw the real drama underneath.

"Gina now said: 'Alright Krishna, we'll announce my name in your picture if you'll give me a ten per cent slice of the gross profit.'

say anything of this at the press conference.'

"I didn't realize what was going on in her mind at the time, why she wanted not only ten per cent, but also three times the salary she'd contracted for!

"Then it was time for the press conference and we went downstairs to the Taj Golden Room where the press had congregated *en masse*. Many press boys had tried to gate-crash Gina's suite earlier and we'd prevented all those we could.

"At the press conference we announced that Gina had agreed to discuss every subject under the sun except *Shalimar*. It was quite a press conference that! Harrowing! Devastating! And all of us were on tenterhooks all through it!

"After the press conference we learned that Busybee of the *Times of India* had already met Gina alone that morning and interviewed her. There was a distinct possibility that Busybee had all the inside dope and that she may well have told him that we'd done something fraudulent in having announced her name without her permission. So we promptly took out a Xerox copy of Gina's signed letter of consent, the original of which we had returned to Gina, and taking that Xerox copy with us both Bhupendra and I went in search of Busybee.

"Bhupendra's a good friend of his, knows where he stays, his favourite haunts and so forth. But it was a Sunday and trying to locate him was one helluva big problem! But Monday morning that story would break in the *Times* and we simply had to know what was going into it. If anything factually incorrect got into that story we'd lose our credibility and never get it back. After spending tons of money on the *muhurat* and on bringing Gina out for it and after having it covered by *Time* and other foreign correspondents and making an international news event out of the launching of *Shalimar*, we simply couldn't allow any one-sided interview of Gina's to appear in the papers.

"It was a dizzy panic!

"We finally managed to track Busybee down and we told him the real story and showed him the Xerox letter of Gina's with her signature on it. Then Busybee showed us the story he'd written for the Monday morning issue of the *Times* and in it was mentioned that Gina hadn't made up her mind yet. This was okay with us, as we'd decided on this as our official line for the time being. So we told him the whole truth and he got his story straight."

I remember vividly the aftermath of that press conference too, for I'd attended it myself and tried to ask some questions about *Shalimar* only to be rebuked by Gina and Krishna both! But the press, which has a ferrety snout for a stinker of a story, smelt something fishy!

Between the time Krishna got to see Busybee's story and the moment they saw Gina off on the plane, it was like walking on fire. Krishna, Ronnie, and Mani Mistri continued to treat the Italian star with the utmost cordiality.

During her stay in India, Gina flew over for a day to New Delhi to meet the Oberoi people. They had promised her a contract, to do a big book of pictures on India and Gina was excited about it. When she came back to Bombay from Delhi, she resumed her *Shalimar* negotiations with Krishna Shah again.

Ronnie Singh and Krishna Shah were both present in the latter round of negotiations with Gina.

"What is this Gina?" Krishna said. "Why do you need all this money? Why should I give you ten per cent? I'm not giving this even to Peter Ustinov." (At that time they were trying their best to get Peter Ustinov for the role that went eventually to Rex Harrison.)

And Gina replied, "I'm a big star, Krishna. I am international!"

"Okay, so you're international!" Krishna retorted. "But when did your last movie click? *My investors are not putting up*

the money because of you, Gina. They're putting up the money because of Krishna Shah, period. You're good for that role, and that's why I offered it to you."

During her few days in Bombay both Zeenat and Dharmendra had constantly visited Gina, lavishing gifts, flowers and a fantastic hospitality on her. Typically, Gina misconstrued all this. She took a shine for Dharam and flirted with him. It was more than enough to give an ageing star whose popularity is on the decline a swollen head.

With this at the back of her mind, Gina retorted: "These two kids, this Dharam and Zeenat, I'm making their careers for them! I'm helping them go international!"

That put Krishna off completely. As he told me later: "No one can make the career of anybody in this whole business. If the audience likes them, their career is made by the audience. Her statement shocked me. It was utterly preposterous. So I just said: 'We'll discuss this again, when I come to Rome.'"

"The moment I walked out of her suite, I told my unit members: 'Gina's out!' I also told this to her Egypt-Air boyfriend. So we went back and we paid for all her expenses during her stay here and we grinned and bore it. Her entire trip to India had punched a huge hole into our budget! Her to-and-fro passage had been paid for by us. It all added up to a sizeable amount.

"After she went away, Gina did try to call us long-distance from Rome, a couple of times. She once called Ronnie even, whom she said she hated so much! But no, the whole thing had turned sour on me. I wanted to have nothing to do with Gina Lollobrigida any more. Inevitably, a section of the press gave out distorted versions of the Lollobrigida episode. Most of the stories were concocted and baseless."

Like the May 1977 issue of *Cine Blitz* had a piece called "THE SHALIMAR EPISODE. WAS GINA DUPED?" written by an alleged journalist named Poky: "The question now being asked

in the industry is: *After all this fanfare, will Shalimar be made?* Everybody in Hollywood knows Krishna Shah's financial limitations. Ranveer Singh, supposedly a big-time TV producer, has never been heard of and when in India he was just a small fry. New York sources have him as being in financial difficulties over there. *Is this a ruse to dupe India's film industry, where a co-production is given undue importance and publicity? Is this picture a way for Shah to finance his future Hollywood movies via an Indo-American co-production?* These are the questions being asked. The fact that Hollywood stars, the foreign TV and press were conspicuous by their absence, raises doubts about the project. Where were they when their names were announced as if they were already in India? A great piece of showmanship I agree, but a big hoax." And so on and so forth.

There were some other stories in other magazines along these lines, too. But all the anti-stories worked in reverse! They only succeeded in whipping up interest in *Shalimar*.

THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

The most painful period for Krishna Shah—and *Shalimar*—was the next two months. Diane and Krishna went back to America in mid-May. It was time to get down seriously to business and organize the American part of the project.

Krishna went first to New York, then to Los Angeles. There he met the heads of the William Morris Agency and The International Creative Management, in fact all agencies handling the big-name stars.

Originally, they had planned for Gina Lollobrigida, Peter Ustinov, and John Saxon as the international stars for the film. John Saxon, of course, is a personal friend of Krishna's, and there was no question of negotiating formally between them. John had already read the script and he wanted to play the lead in the movie. When Krishna announced the cast, he hadn't even told John what role he was allotting the actor. "I only told him that he was going to be in my picture. And he agreed to go along with me. We didn't even discuss the money."

It was a time of crisis—again a time of crisis!

Krishna had already weathered several since he had embarked on the fantastic *Shalimar* adventure—the Gulshan Rai let-down, the Amitabh Bachchan fiasco, and the Gina Lollobrigida debacle being the three major ones.

Now it was time for the Peter Ustinov crisis.

Ustinov had been contacted earlier through his agent. Now it seemed that when Krishna got back to them again, Ustinov

had a problem with dates. The International Creative Management, which once represented Krishna for ten years in London, was representing Ustinov also. The head of the Agency, Dick Blogett, was Krishna's agent, too.

Earlier, Ronnie Singh had been talking constantly to Dick Blogett, long-distance from Bombay, and Dick had worked out the basic money-deal and everything for Peter Ustinov.

Round about the same time, Ustinov was offered *Murder On The Nile*, a sequel to Agatha Christie's *Murder On The Orient Express*. "When we heard about this," Krishna commented, "we took it coolly not realizing it was danger area. I thought I'd meet Ustinov personally and sort it out with him."

And then three things happened: Peter Ustinov had a problem with dates, and the *Shalimar* shooting schedule could not be postponed any further, just to accommodate him; Gina Lollobrigida was out because she wanted so much more money after having signed a contract; besides, she was doing such a big favour to our two top-notch Indian stars Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman by making international stars of them; and John Saxon was being offered another picture; Krishna talked to Saxon long-distance, and Saxon asked him to come over fast and finalize matters.

Naturally, they had to speed up their work.

Whomsoever they talked to about making a film in India was still asking the inevitable questions, about dysentery, drinking water, cholera, the bureaucracy, and so forth. Both Krishna Shah and Ranveer Singh came face to face with a solid wall of scepticism, everywhere. "Nobody in America seemed terribly excited at the prospect of doing a movie in India!" Krishna grinned ruefully. "Furthermore, many people were familiar with the script, which in its original shape was *Johannesburg Jigsaw*. Ben Benjamin of The International Creative Management had read it and so had the casting people in the movie department of the big agencies. Though they liked the script

the response from them was lukewarm."

With this kind of half-hearted response, panic began to set in. Krishna was meeting lots of people, but they weren't good meetings. They were meetings held merely on the strength of his personal relationships. Feeling increasingly depressed, Krishna tried locating Ranveer Singh to come over and give him moral support. "He was untraceable for at least ten days!" Krishna exclaimed. "During that time Diane and I were making frantic phone calls to Bombay—but no Ronnie! Finally we found he was in London, all the time lying sick in bed!"

Diane now went off to friends in Boston while Krishna flew across to the West Coast. He spent ten to twelve painful days in Los Angeles. Everywhere, people were telling him that he was making a big mistake with this project. "They said that making a movie in India would not enhance my career. Instead, if anything, after *The River Niger* it was a step backwards. They pointed out to me that not one Indian film had got a commercial release abroad on the big international theatre circuits, and this project of mine also wouldn't get such a release. After all, who the hell knows about who Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman are in America?"

"I talked to two distributors," Krishna continued, "and the key man was Jerry Levy. He became a catalyst for me, in a way. He is a very perceptive man and he made a realistic appraisal of the package when I put it before him. He would sit with me for hours, giving me all kinds of advice and examples. He'd call agents from other agencies for our talk-sessions and he'd get them to give me their advice too.

"After my very first talk-session with Jerry Levy, I was thoroughly demoralized. He told me that I'd be wasting two precious years of my life. If I was unemployed here in the States, fine, then I could go along and do a picture in India. But if I wasn't unemployed in America, what was the big idea in leaving the main market and going back to India? Wasn't it better to make movies

in America?

"I was supposed to direct *Crush*, a property I had developed for Filmways, an American movie company, starring Jeff Bridges, a top Hollywood actor. I also had a contract to direct an unusual film entitled *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, based on a bestseller. Now, the crucial decision had to be made. I opted for India. My agents and friends couldn't understand me! Maybe I was returning to India, to find my roots in the year of *Roots*.

"Imagine Jerry Levy for a moment. . . he's a huge, three hundred-pounder of a man with layers and layers of fat around him! He wears a grey toupee and he's a great womanizer! He's a very tough negotiator, a no-nonsense businessman. He's been my personal manager for five years now. He knows the movie business and the distribution business inside out. *Jerry was very emphatic that it was a total waste of time doing a movie in India.*

"I told him about this documentary I was doing on the history of Indian cinema and he just laughed in my face! He made jokes about it. He also asked me what made me think of taking on Gina Lollobrigida and Peter Ustinov for *Shalimar*? They were both losers, he insisted. Casting Ustinov, he said, was like casting Ray Milland in 1978. He was positive that I'd not be able to get a big commercial release in America with this kind of cast. John Saxon's market-value, he added, was only in South-East Asia and Latin America; he's okay only for certain countries and eventually for future television sales in the U.S. *But all in all, with a package like Shalimar he said, I was a doomed man!*

"I talked to other agents and even to some distributors—but they all repeated what Jerry Levy had said: I'd not get a big commercial release in America; it'd only be on the modest art-cinema circuits like the ones that occasionally screened Satyajit Ray's movies. *Worse, they said, mine would be neither an art-movie, nor a commercial movie, but some strange, in-between:*

creature!

"They pointed out that Dev Anand had once associated himself with a movie called *The Evil Within*. It had been financed by 20th Century-Fox and when I met one of the Fox representatives they told me that this movie had been a big joke wherever it had been screened! They could not even release it everywhere! It was a story about Viet Nam and they had Dev Anand and an Indian actress named Zeenat Aman in it!

"I blushed like hell inside myself when I heard that! I just couldn't bring myself to tell them that this same Zeenat Aman was India's top leading-lady now and that she was going to be the leading-lady of my film too!"

"I was rock-bottom where being demoralized was concerned. But I suddenly bounced back and reminded myself that I'd made a commitment to do this picture in India—and I'd do it!

"I went and met Jerry Levy again. He knew my script by heart, inside out. We sat down to make a list of all the actors available. Harold Cohen, of Associated Management had meanwhile even promoted my project and they'd brought in a couple of deals, one from Italy and another from Argentina.

"At one stage I'd planned to do this picture with Harold Cohen producing it. But that was over now. So I told Harold Cohen that I simply had to introduce my two Indian stars Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman in the international market and they'd just have to help me make a commercial package out of it. Even Dyan Cannon wanted Sheila's role in the picture, the role I'd given to Zeenat. But I was committed to my Indian stars and that was that.

"So Jerry Levy, Harold Cohen, and I, we sat together and made a list of actors for the part of Sir John. *We wanted an actor who'd fit the role and at the same time a star who'd turn Shalimar into an A-Grade package.* On that list were Marlon Brando, Rex Harrison, Burt Lancaster, and David Niven, in that order. For the Contessa's part we had on our list Sylvia

Kristel the *Emmanuelle* girl, Number One in Britain right now; Dyan Cannon and Brenda Vaccaro.

"John Saxon's role of course went to John Saxon, because by then I'd met John and I'd explained to him that he wasn't playing the lead, but a mute character named Col. Colomibus and that it was going to be exciting, it was going to be fun, and I promised him a darned good time.

"For ten years John and I had been talking about working together—and this was our first opportunity. John was game for it. It's a small but very interesting part and eventually John Saxon went on to give it an interesting and colourful dimension.

"By now I'd made a deal for the equipment with the Panavision people too. Ronnie Singh had arrived in New York and I flew there to meet him.

"Ronnie for his part was having a whole host of problems of his own, of putting together the whole organization, the insurance problem, things like that. He had such big burdens on his shoulders that I decided not to bother him about the casting. *By then I knew consciously what I'd known in my heart of hearts all along; that I'd have the biggest stars in this package.*

"Diane returned from Boston and the two of us had a long, long chat: whom do we take? Whom do we go to for the American end of the financing? If I had to have top stars we'd need to pay out fantastic amounts. I'd have to recast the budget, speak to the investors plus a whole lot of other worries. We were getting into the three-quarters of a million dollars bracket with the actors. There would be all kinds of tax problems, a whole lot of deferred payments, once we went into the quarter of a million dollars bracket with actors like Ustinov."

Ronnie Singh, meanwhile, was having insurance problems with the package, so Krishna introduced him to his own insurance agents who had insured *Rivals* in America and England.

"We were doing a thousand things at a time, all simultaneously!" Krishna exclaimed. "In between all this work I was even sneak-

ing off to the nearest cinema-houses in New York to see *Star Wars* and *The Greatest*.

"Because my apartment in New York had been sublet, I took a suite in a hotel in the middle of town from where all the theatres are within walking distance. I saw a whole lot of plays and movies then.

"It was hectic! Business meetings throughout the day, over lunch, over tea, over cocktails, and over dinner. Suddenly, in the middle of a meeting, I'd excuse myself and leaving Ronnie to handle things, I'd sneak off to see a movie!

"I made up my mind that I'd do the international casting of Shalimar from London, and not from New York for several reasons.

"The main reason was that in America, as an American director, I'd have all kinds of compulsory expenses whereas, as an American director operating from London, I'd find things cheaper. The same actor would have cost more in America than in London.

"My office had now shifted from 450 Park Avenue, New York, to London. You see, to get the technicians entirely from America would have cost us prohibitively. According to our co-production deal as processed by the Government of India, the rule was that only a specified sum of money could be spent on the foreign technicians in rupees. The rest would have to be in American dollars.

"It was a dollar budget and a rupee budget delicately balanced. Furthermore, American artistes do not favour being paid a lump sum remuneration in one year; they prefer spreading out the income over a period of from seven to ten years.

"While I was tackling these problems, Ronnie Singh was tackling problems of his own. Like Sony, the Japanese electronics people, for example. They had promised us thirty-six video monitors for an integral sequence of the *Shalimar* script. At the last moment they backed out, causing another major crisis!

"By now, Ronnie and I had divided the work. He would go into technicians and I would go into actors. He'd stay back in New York to sort out the hassles there, and I'd fly to London, meet the actors' agents there and sort out the casting problems. Hell, those were nerve-wracking days! It kept on bugging me, the thought that I'd be wasting two whole years in India, because that's how long they take to make a movie there! And going back to America after those two years I'd have to start all over again.

"While Ronnie was finalizing with Tom Brumberger, David Wilson, and others, I was talking with Dyan Cannon and was keen on Rod Steiger. But at that time, Rod was being negotiated for a bigger and more prestigious picture.

"Rex Harrison's name kept cropping up now and then. And do you know who initially suggested him? Suresh! Yes, Suresh Shah. The pillar of strength behind us informed me that Rex is a big name in India because both *My Fair Lady* and *Dolittle* had been big box-office hits in India—and I began to see the wisdom in Suresh's suggestion.

"At the same time, the other side of the matter was that Rex was *class*—not box-office. After *My Fair Lady*, his last big hit, he'd not had other hits to his credit for at least a decade today. You know, 45 per cent of the entire world market is ~~America~~ and in America, Rex is *class*.

"For my part, I did not think that Rex was a ~~family screen~~ actor; but a terrific stage actor—yes. So I kept ~~putting him on~~ mentally. I was still pursuing the Peter Ustinov-Rod Steiger-Marlon Brando route.

"In London I contacted Brando but he was tied up in *Superman* and I couldn't set up a meeting. I met his business representative instead. He told me that even if I met Brando and got him to read the *Shalimar* script, it was no use; Brando was already committed to do a picture in Thailand after *Superman*.

"My mind went off in the direction of Burt Lancaster and

David Niven. By now, I was needlessly opposing my agents and my distributors, because they all thought that Rex would be superb for the part of Sir John in *Shalimar*. I refused to believe them! I sent my script to Ben Benjamin, Burt Lancaster's agent."

"When I arrived in London there was nothing at all happening for four days because of the Queen's Coronation Jubilee. The whole country apparently, had ground down to a halt in those four days! Then I thought of Peter O'Toole. Peter had been Ronnie's classfellow in London.

"Time was running out on me. With my commitment to start the shooting in India on a particular date looming large in front of me, plus the fact that I couldn't remain indefinitely in London, I had only seven days left now to cast the most crucial role of *Shalimar*."

ENTER SEXY REXY

While Krishna Shah was running around in circles in London trying to cast Sir John, things were going sour back in Bombay.

Krishna's first inkling of this came from some Indian tourists visiting London, who told him that rumours had begun to circulate in India that *Shalimar* had been dropped. They told him that Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman had both already allotted the dates they'd reserved for *Shalimar* to director Vijay Anand for a film called *Ram Balram*.

Suresh Shah was in Dubai then. He joined Krishna in London. Then O.P. Ralhan and Dharmendra came to London, too, and so did Amarjeet.

A mini-*Shalimar* summit was formed willy-nilly in London and Krishna took heart again when Suresh reassured him that the deal was still on; *Shalimar* would be made and the rumour-mongers could go to hell.

Krishna was told that Zeenat was getting an adverse press in India because of the Battle of the Boobs at the *Shalimar* *muhurat*. It all tended to depress Krishna Shah very deeply—and it made him acutely conscious that he couldn't dawdle over the casting of Sir John much longer because it had become vitally imperative to return to the main centre of operations, Bombay, if the entire project wasn't to go up in smoke.

Dick Blogett, the English agent, thought Krishna crazy, the way he was running around, meeting one agent after another

with the *Shalimar* script! Krishna explained to him that he was in a desperate hurry, that he'd lose an awful lot of money and prestige if he didn't finalize Sir John in a week and move on to more pressing matters.

"We now learned that David Niven was away on a yachting cruise and that Burt Lancaster's agent was asking for a firm offer for three quarters of a million dollars before Burt read the script.

"I said: 'Yes, it's a firm offer and I want an answer in seventy-two hours, or else the deal is off!' The fact is, if Burt accepted I'd be in a real fix, because I made this deal with Ben Benjamin without telling anybody—even my investors—and I didn't know from where the hell all that money would come!"

They were already into June 1977 then, and the shooting was set to start in Bangalore on 15 September! The Bombay office too—Laxmi Productions—were facing problems. Nothing was happening at their end! There was no news from the music department. The first song was scheduled to be recorded on 24 June and there was no news at all about what was happening!

Krishna was still trying for Peter O'Toole even while the talks with Burt Lancaster weren't concluded. Though Peter wasn't asking for a high price, he wanted a partnership deal, something Krishna wasn't prepared to give.

So...Peter Ustinov was out. Peter O'Toole was out. David Niven was out. Steven Kenis the agent at William Morris Agency kept mentioning Rex Harrison, but Krishna hadn't come around to thinking about Rex seriously.

Listen to Krishna Shah tell it. "Seventy-two hours was my deadline on Burt Lancaster. Even before the deadline ran out, I told Ronnie: 'Everyone keeps saying Rex Harrison! Rex Harrison! Let's go and meet him!'"

"Ronnie said: 'But Krishna, why Rex? You don't like him as a screen actor. Why him?'"

"I replied: 'He's terrific. They think he's got Class in America.

The package will become stronger with him in it.'

"So we went to the local post office and put through a call to Steve Kenis at 6.35 P.M. when he was about to close his office.

"I said: 'Steve?'

"Steve sounded surprised.

" 'Steve', I said. 'It's about Rex Harrison!'

" 'What about the price?' Steve asked.

" 'You name the price, Steve,' I said.

" 'Are you making an offer, Ksishna?' he asked.

" 'Yes,' I said. 'I'm making an offer!'

"When you make an offer in America, even orally, it's as binding as a written agreement and you can be held to it.

"Steve named the price. It was over half a million dollars and there were all kinds of strings attached to the deal. For my part, I made only one condition.

" 'What's your condition?' Steve sounded cautious.

" 'I'll fly down personally and meet Rex,' I told Steve. 'I'll talk to him and I'll give him the script.'

" 'No,' Steve said. 'I don't think he'd like to meet you until he's read the script first.'

" 'Then there's no deal,' I said.

"Silence over the wires.

" Then I heard Steve's voice again.

"He said: 'Okay, I'll call him... then I'll call you back.'

It was a nerve-racking three-hour wait. Steve had to call Rex Harrison at Nice, in the South of France, where Rex stays and he called Krishna Shah back at about 9 P.M.

" 'Yes, Steve?'

" 'You'll have to fly to Paris at once', Steve said. 'Call Rex at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning. Then go along and meet him. And Krishna...'

" 'Yes?' I said.

" 'He's very fussy about time. Don't be late or anything like

that.'

"Then Steve gave me all the do's and don'ts about Rex Harrison and warned me that Rex, by and large, could be a difficult man.

"It was tough getting tickets to Paris, but we finally made it through an Indian travel agency in London. Then we were held up at Paris airport because we had no entry visas for France! The authorities wanted to shunt us back! The French are very sticky about visas! And we, like fools, had gone with no means of identification at all! Not even a single newspaper clipping to prove who we were! They said: 'If you want Rex Harrison, speak to him over the telephone!' They just wouldn't allow us to enter Paris!

"The London press had been giving us good coverage. *Screen International* had carried a piece on us with photographs that same week. Ronnie now started searching frantically for that copy of the magazine at the airport! Because we had no visas, because neither of us knew French, we were both stranded at that airport for over two and a half hours!

"Finally, I lost my cool. When in trouble I holler and yell! Now I started screaming at the airport authorities and the more I yelled, the more Ronnie tried to pacify them, explaining to them that—'Krishna Shah is a temperamental American director. He works for Paramount and Universal Studios and it's an insult to treat him the way you folks are doing. This eventually will bring bad publicity to France!'

"Ronnie tried all sorts of ridiculous angles! He said: 'We have come to spend money in France. If you don't want our money, it's your loss. We'll go back. But you're going to get a very bad name in Hollywood for this!'

"He even said: 'We're going to pay Rex a half million dollars and it'll come to your Government's treasury!'—corny things like that!

"After arguing for two and a half hours, they arrived at a

compromise. They let us pass through, but we couldn't stay in France for more than twenty-four hours if we didn't get visas during that period.

"We took the first available train to Nice. It looked beautiful there by the sea. It's such a lovely ocean over there that I was reminded for a moment of the ocean off Mahabalipuram [outside Madras]. I felt a distinct feeling of peace here, and with it came confidence. We telephoned Rex and he asked us over to meet him.

"Rex and I got talking and it was a most enjoyable talk. It was a subtle, two-way audition. He was auditioning us and I was auditioning him! I was playing it cool, because the deadline on Burt Lancaster still hadn't run out. In case Rex Harrison said 'No', I still had a deal on the line.

"Rex Harrison really impressed me. He was the spitting image of the Sir John of my script. We three were sitting there and his lady friend Ms. Tinker walks in with the wine, so much like Sheila the hostess and Sir John's friend from *Shalimar*.

"Rex and I talked about the theatre. Here my theatre background helped me a lot. And in the course of our conversation we found a common link. He was a theatre actor and I was a stage director. We both faced the same hurdles, of translating theatre into film.

"We both know our theatre very well. And for hours we talked and talked, about what he had learned over the years, how he had succeeded, where he had failed, what he had done, what he would like to do. He told me his theories on acting, and I told him mine. Then I gave him the script.

"The following day we had lunch together. Ms. Mercia Tinker is a fabulous hostess. What a marvellous lunch, with all those servants waiting on us! Rex's lovely estate was full of greenery and Rex himself was wearing a baggy old English coat. The majestic atmosphere of opulence was nothing short of royalty. It was like a scene with Sir John from *Shalimar* itself.

Rex served a very expensive wine and himself had quite a few bottles during our lunch. Rex is a compulsive wine drinker and downs a good six to eight bottles of wine every day. And that wine of his is excellent!

"Throughout that lunch we talked no business. But as soon as lunch was over we started to discuss the script and I could see he was hooked on it. Normally, with actors of his calibre, most of the time one is writing and re-writing the script to suit his convenience. But Rex fell in love with the dialogue. He told me that I had captured the old Victorian English so beautifully.

"Now we had to decide what nationality the character of Sir John should be, specifically. I said we'd leave the issue open for a later discussion. I had, in the original script, given the story a South African setting because I myself had been in South Africa for years, where I used to do a lot of theatre work. I had founded an Academy of Dramatic Arts there in my theatre days, and I knew the South African milieu very well.

"Rex now told me that he'd like to do the picture, but warned me that he's very expensive! He said he'd ask Steve to negotiate with us because he liked the role and the script. He jokingly asked me whether we'd be able to get him unlimited quantities of his favourite wine into India when he came there for the shooting!

"Rex stays about fifteen miles outside Nice, near the ocean. That evening we had a terrific time. I have learned one thing about myself—whenever I am by the ocean or a seashore, I can think very clearly. And my hotel-room in Nice was slap-bang on the ocean!

"I bought a copy of a book called *Notes of a Director* by Brian Forbes. It was about three hundred pages long. I went through this book, had a lavish French dinner costing several hundred francs and I stayed at that lovely hotel for two days! In those two days, Ronnie and I discussed the project at length

and in depth.

"At the end of two days, after establishing a beautiful rapport with Rex Harrison, we returned to London."

The return to London, too, was not uneventful. At Nice airport (flying to Paris) Krishna Shah slipped and fell and arrived in Paris in acute pain! The air-hostess took good care of him, but they again had trouble at Paris. "It's the worst airport in the world," Krishna Shah commented, "*because they obviously don't like tourists over there!*"

"It was terrible in the First Aid Emergency Ward! There was this beautiful, young air-hostess who took me over there and there she met a handsome young doctor, and while I was groaning in acute agony, the two of them were making out merrily with one another!

"I screamed and I hollered and I said I'd sue the hospital, sue the doctors, sue France in general! When I created this big rumpus, they took me to a hospital for the night. The waiting at this hospital too was agonizing—filling out this form, that form and the other form—just like in India! The bureaucracy over there in Paris is as bad as anywhere here in India!

"At about two or three in the morning the doctors gave their verdict: a fracture. They put my leg in a cast and told me I'd have to rest for at least two to three days before I could go back to London.

"I wanted out—immediately! I simply had to get back to London at once, because the Burf Lancaster matter was weighing heavily on my mind. I was sure there'd be a crisis, now that we had practically finalized everything with Rex Harrison for the same role.

"When Ronnie and I returned to our hotel in London, we found no telegram waiting. Ben Benjamin or someone had phoned but left no message. Before they could call again I sent him a cable saying that the role was no longer exclusive, and that we were in the process of negotiating with another actor,

too. I also pointed out that the money on the Burt deal was too high.

"Then we plunged body and soul into working out the legal deal with Rex. It was a very big deal, involving all kinds of deferments, territory, everything. It was a very skilfully devised deal. *If we were to have Rex, we'd have to have a Completion Bond without which we could not get the insurance on him.* In that area, Suresh Shah's help was needed with the banks, because without the insurance it was impossible to have Rex."

With the Rex Harrison deal in the hands of the investors and the lawyers, Krishna Shah was left with one loose end still to be tied up—the replacement of Gina Lollobrigida.

While Krishna and Ronnie were in Paris, they had thought of stopping by and looking up Ursula Andress. Though they thought Sylvia Kristel right for the role of Contessa, Ursula Andress was their first choice. She's also a big sexpot in Europe and pictures in Europe sell only on her name just as pictures in South-East Asia and Latin America sell only on John Saxon's name.

Krishna Shah and Ranveer Singh had planned to meet Ursula Andress in Rome, but because of Krishna's broken leg they couldn't stop over in Rome and had to fly direct to London instead. After the Lollobrigida debacle only Ronnie had talked to her on the phone when she'd called him long-distance in London. *Variety* had carried a story on *Shalimar* saying that Peter Ustinov, Gina Lollobrigida, and John Saxon were in the movie. This had perplexed La Lollo who wanted Ronnie to explain why her name was still appearing. She probably thought that Krishna Shah was having second thoughts!

That story in *Variety* caused them a lot of trouble. Yet, to counterbalance that, there was a striking full page ad of *Shalimar* designed by Amarjeet in that very special issue of *Variety* which was helpful to them. It was an interesting layout that made co-production a little more romantic than it really is

when two different countries get together to make a movie.

There was a story in that issue as well as in other Hollywood trade papers. *It talked about the five hundred movies being made every year in India; about how many laboratories there are in India; how many studios; how many technicians. Look at India, it said: Here are two Indians who've been to the West and made a name for themselves there, and now they're back in India making a Hollywood movie there!*

Anyway, back to Ursula Andress...

Krishna went to see her latest movie. He found her terrific in it and even thought seriously about re-writing the role in *Shalimar* to suit her.

Dimitri Grunwald, an old-fashioned White Russian-turned-Englishman, a well-known figure in London film distribution and financing circles, had become interested in the *Shalimar* packaging. As soon as he saw Ursula Andress' name cropping up here, he contacted Krishna Shah immediately and said not to take Ursula.

"Go for Sylvia Kristel," Grunwald advised. "She's the hottest at the moment."

Naturally—because of *Emmanuelle*!

But Sylvia was charging four hundred thousand dollars per movie! Even then, Grunwald insisted that Krishna should get Sylvia, that he'd get the money for her. He said he'd be able to revise upwards all the territorial deals to cover that additional four hundred thousand dollars, but that Sylvia Kristel should be in the *Shalimar* package at any cost.

Sylvia had just come to London then, where she was living with her boyfriend, an English actor. That actor, incidentally, had also been one of Ranveer Singh's classmates at school in London! And Ronnie, being a guy who builds all his contacts on the principle that you never know who will be useful to you and when, felt optimistic that he could get the *Emmanuelle* star.

Krishna commented: "A little contact, and Ronnie can turn

it into an important deal! I feel embarrassed to say that it takes me much longer to know a person before I can be so confident as to be certain that I can do an important deal with him! But Ronnie's not like that! And it's an attitude that can be pretty helpful . . . most times!"

This apparently was not one of those "most times," because when Ronnie tried to contact Sylvia Kristel, they learned she had just left for Hollywood to do a movie. In a way of course, this was okay with Krishna, because the *Shalimar* package had been set up in such a way that the Indian stars Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman had the main roles. If he put big Hollywood stars in smaller roles and paid them their price, people would laugh at them for having taken big Hollywood stars, then cast them in side roles. Krishna, of course, anticipated that the problem would arise not in selling the Indian version, but in selling the international version, because of the casting—but Krishna's a bulldozer, he can and does bulldoze his way through any number of crises. And right then, Krishna decided to defer that particular problem—he'd cross that bridge when he came to it.

In a way, Gina Lollobrigida had pin-pointed this problem, though crudely, by saying: "You want international stars to make the international careers of your Indian stars!"

This was Krishna's problem all through, while packaging Shalimar for the international market. Everyone was wondering whether Krishna had gone mad and were saying: "Put your Indian stars in supporting roles. Why are you giving them the lead parts?" Jerry Levy, too, flipped when he heard what Krishna had done. Indian actors, apparently, are a big joke in Hollywood. Those who had seen a few Indian movies had laughed their guts out and, looking at the situation from a Western perspective, one does understand why this is so.

So Dimitri Grunwald was egging Krishna Shah to take on Sylvia Kristel and he'd also given his blessings to the casting of Rex Harrison. Krishna's head was in a whirl, and right then

they tried half a dozen different types of packages for *Shalimar*! "Rex Harrison, Sylvia Kristel, John Saxon! My God, you have an A-Grade package! They all said: "Why don't you do that and say: 'Introducing two stars from India?' "

A tempting proposition indeed, especially viewing the kind of returns you get on an A-Grade package in the international market.

Back in Bombay during Krishna's and Ronnie's long stay in the West, things were going to pieces at an alarming rate. Mani Mistri who, single-handed, was holding the fort for them at Laxmi Productions was growing frantic with worry and telling them all the alarming rumours on long-distance. It reminded Krishna and Ronnie not to grow complacent just because they'd brought off a successful Rex Harrison coup!

Right then, Suresh Shah, the financial strength behind *Shalimar*, was also in London with Krishna and Ronnie and he continued to prove a tower of strength to them.

"Throughout all this," Krishna told me, "Suresh was fantastic! Every afternoon I'd sit with him and sound him out on all sorts of packages. He didn't know the difference between Sylvia Kristel and another actress. But he had seen *Emmanuelle* [which Indian who went abroad hadn't?] and liked her. He'd always ask me: 'What do you think?' and in this way, he'd help me to articulate and get a clearer mental picture of what I really wanted. Suresh was more than just a financial partner. He was a total help. His confidence was superb. He was there in London enjoying his holiday, seeing a whole lot of movies and giving me tremendous moral support in the bargain!"

Now Dharmendra arrived in London too, and met Krishna at a party. He was terribly excited because his picture had appeared in *Screen International* and all the Indians there were talking about it. He kept asking Krishna if Gina would be in

the picture after all; Krishna said "No," and told Dharmendra the whole story.

Krishna and Dharmendra had lunch with a group of British journalists and that made Dharam feel even better. Krishna's work in London was not yet over, and despite Mani's frantic phone calls he wasn't ready to go back to Bombay yet.

Krishna had yet to finish not only the casting in London, but to fix up the technicians too. Mani was constantly ringing long-distance, telling Krishna that the music hadn't been recorded yet, and that consequently shooting in September would be impossible. So entrusting the remaining work in London in Ranveer Singh's hands, Krishna dropped everything and returned to Bombay.

By now Rex Harrison's 75-page contract had been sealed, signed, and delivered. With Sexy Remy on the dotted line, they knew that the overseas financing of *Shalimar* was secure.

Before leaving for Bombay, Krishna had lunch with Sylvia Miles. He had known her very well from his days in the theatre. She'd seen Krishna Shah's *Rivals* too. She was a volatile, temperamental person but a terrific actress who had been nominated for an Oscar for her acting in *Midnight Cowboy* and again in *Farewell, My Lovely*. According to Krishna, Sylvia Miles is a faghead in America. Like, Mae West and Marilyn Monroe were fagheads too; a kind of legend, a cult figure among the homosexuals in America who are an important segment of the cinema audience.

"Sylvia," added Krishna Shah "is very upper class, very jet-set, like the rest of the Andy Warhol group. She is very arty. Her reputation as an actress is good. She's a director's actress.

"Right then Sylvia Kristel was beyond our reach since she'd taken an Hollywood assignment on six hundred thousand dollars. So, by the time I reached Bombay I made my decision and phoned back to Ronnie Singh to call up our agencies in America and tell them about the other Sylvia, Sylvia Miles."

The most glamorous
clapper-girl in the
world...Gina Lollobrigida
at the *Shalimar muhurat* with
Zeenat facing the cameras.



The first day on the sets in Bangalore...Rex Harrison and friend,
Mercia Tinker, with *Shalimar* Financier-Producer Suresh Shah.





Hema Malini, sandwiched between Dharmendra and O.P. Ralhan, was of great help to Dharam—and *Shalimar*.

Executive Producer, Ranveer Singh (*centre*) introduces Gina to H.K. Shah, Chairman Ramon House Group





The first day's shooting — Director Krishna Shah briefs Dharam before the shot.



Sylvia Miles and boyfriend Craig who was flown out to India to keep her company.



One of the many complicated scenes of *Shalimar*, shot indoors at Bangalore. Standing (*centre right*) with hands on hips is American cinematographer, Harvey Genkins.

American John Saxon
and Englishman
Rex Harrison in a scene
from the film.



PANDEMONIUM IN BOMBAY

When Krishna Shah returned to Bombay everything was pandemonium!

He was faced with a barrage of rumours. They told him all the wild stories circulating of *Shalimar* having gone up in smoke! As if listening to the tales which his unit members had to tell him weren't enough Krishna also got the film-industry's tittle-tattle from O.P. Ralhan himself, who briefed him as to how jolly the local movie-wallahs were feeling about the *Shalimar* fiasco.

The situation in Bombay was indeed terrible. By now, a huge investment had been locked up in the film—and not a distributor in sight! Even the few who had paid some advances were asking for refunds! Two of these distributors, who had paid fat cheques in advance, cancelled them, causing them to bounce. And all because of the rumours that *Shalimar* would never be made.

What really happened in Bombay while Krishna Shah and Ranveer Singh were abroad?

Nobody tells it better than Mani Mistri, who had to bear the entire burden of those harrowing days on her own shoulders:

"When Ronnie and Krishna went abroad, Kenny [Kenny Kochar, the Chief Production Manager] and I were left alone in Bombay. Kenny has had over 15 years of experience in the film world—and I had none!

"Every time Ronnie would ring us from London, he'd say:

'Oh, everything is fine and I met so-and-so for lunch and so-and-so for dinner', or whatever, and he'd go on and on in that rambling, amiable fashion of his that can be quite exasperating when your nerves are on edge.

"Just before leaving India, both Krishna and Ronnie had gone to Delhi to finalize some aspects of the co-production deal with the Government. The script was passed. The clearance for collaboration was also signed. But everything was taking its own time going through the long maze of bureaucracy.

"Suresh Shah had kept a man posted in Delhi solely for all this work, but he was getting nowhere. We'd be on the telephone all day talking to various Secretaries of various Ministers and also getting nowhere. We knew that before Krishna and Ronnie returned, we had to have everything from the Government in writing, sealed, signed, and delivered.

"What things? Well, important things like the living expenses of the foreigners, their salaries, the terms for the payment of the air tickets and a million and one other things connected with this fantastic project!

"Altogether, about eight to ten different ministries of the Government of India were involved in the making of Shalimar—the main one being the Ministry of Finance.

"Even the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting couldn't help us much, and we were trying to get the bureaucrats of one ministry try to help us with their fellow-bureaucrats in the other ministries! We practically lived on long-distance calls to Delhi in those days! And all the time it was so difficult to get those Secretaries, Deputy-Secretaries, Under-Secretaries and so forth on the phone, because either they were out to tea or lunch or gone to the toilet! Anywhere except at their desks!

"Our music-recordings had been fixed up for the month of June (1977) because R.D. Burman was going away on a long concert tour at the end of the month, and Krishna had to come back to Bombay, sit with him and his music-team and work

extensively with them before the lyrics and the song-compositions could be finalized.

"Rumours were again circulating that we did not have Dharam and Zeenat, and that *Shalimar* wasn't going to be made. Both Kenny and I were facing hell in that office in those days! Every time we'd phone Krishna or Ronnie at London we'd get nothing much out of them about the casting. We didn't even know whether Ustinov was in or out!

"Anyway, once I just blew my top over the phone at Krishna in London! 'We can't handle this end any more,' I yelled at him. 'If R.D. goes away and your music isn't recorded, how will you shoot? He's not coming back till September—remember?'

"Every evening Kenny and I were going to R.D.'s home and having long sessions with him. We made an all-out effort to make him delay his overseas concert tour! He actually postponed his departure by a few weeks to suit our convenience.

"By now the rumours were pretty hot that the dates which Dharmendra had originally allotted for the *Shalimar* shooting had been given away to other producers, so I rang up Dharam and asked him about it.

"Don't listen to any of that crap!' Dharam told me. 'If ever I think of doing any such thing I'd tell you first. Please ring up Krishna in London and tell him I'm with him all along the line.'

"I next rang up Zeenat's mother, Mrs Heinz. She told me: 'As far as Babusha is concerned, your dates are all *pukka*. Don't listen to the rumours. They're being spread by wishful thinkers.'

"That made my day!"

"Kenny would all this while be cursing Ronnie because of the various still unsolved ministry problems which had grown into a big headache. Meanwhile, Krishna rang up to tell me about Sylvia Kristel and that excited me a lot. I knew through the foreign film-mags that she's a big star in the West today.

"Kenny didn't give two hoots one way or the other about

the overseas casting! But I knew that the local press would love to have Sylvia Kristel around and we could get a lot of publicity mileage out of that.

"Krishna next told me about Rex and that they were still negotiating and that we weren't to breathe a word of it to anybody! I didn't even tell Kenny about Rex until one day Ronnie mentioned it to Kenny over long-distance from America and that made Kenny's day too.

"Then we heard about Krishna breaking his leg! That really worried us and we'd imagine them going through all sorts of troubles over there and not being able to return to India in time!

"To cap all our problems during this time, Suresh Shah's office also informed us that a fat cheque paid by a distributor had bounced! This was in early June. We tried frantically to contact that distributor in the South but he simply avoided coming to the phone! He was the first person associated with *Shalimar* to be affected by the rumours and to back out. Soon, more were to follow!"

The news that neither Gina Lollobrigida nor Peter Ustinov were in *Shalimar* spread like wildfire and when Krishna Shah got back to Bombay it was hell.

"I knew that we had to create a damn good image all over again, to regain our credibility," Krishna Shah said. "The first thing I did was call in Amarjeet.

"A producer in his own right, publicity is Amarjeet's hobby, his passion. I had met him at Sunil Dutt's party where he prepared a special cocktail for me. I later found out that some of the dishes on the menu were also cooked by him! I found an artist in him even in his cooking and in the way he mixed the cocktail. Instantly, we clicked.

"On my first visit to India, Bombay was flooded with hoardings of Dev Anand's *Jaane Man*. These stood out from the rest

by their originality and sophistication. Visually, they communicated the message very effectively. I enquired who'd created them, and learned it was Amarjeet.

"Amarjeet designed all the visual publicity for *Shalimar*. For this, we spent many evenings at his house or in our office, over drinks or dinner. After such sessions, suddenly an idea would click. The whole campaign began with the famous title, *The Fact Is* and our campaign became a legend. I think Amarjeet can hold his own on Madison Avenue any time!

Right away, we got him to create two ads. Both were quite brilliant. The first was about the picture being the biggest money-spinner of the year, and the other said: 'NOT BERNARD SHAW BUT KRISHNA SHAH. NOT NOEL COWARD BUT KADAR KHAN. NOT GENE KELLY BUT HIRALAL' and so forth.

"Our object was to emphasize the Indianness of the project here. Amarjeet was our barometer in terms of popularity and it was great discussing these things with him. He knows the dynamics of the movie-machine as he's been a producer himself.

"Amarjeet pointed out that our project lacked distributors because the Indian distributors were under the impression that *Shalimar* was going to be some sort of high-falutin' English picture—and that too, one which may or may not be made! That's why the distributors were fighting shy of buying the rights. *They simply had to be convinced that in spite of the co-production deal and the foreign stars, Shalimar was essentially a box-office oriented Hindi movie!*

"I listened to Amarjeet carefully. He was responsible for making me face the hard reality squarely. In attempting to fight down the rumours and the anti-publicity, we unleashed a full-volley campaign now—both advertising as well as editorial promotion. Ad. after ad., press-release after press-release; special interviews after special interviews; started splashes in the local press week after week. It was a slow and uphill task. It was very tough undoing the damage already done.

"The Gina episode had been the greatest blow to us. *Filmfare* carried two tongue-in-cheek stories about us which hurt us badly. Those stories destroyed the confidence of our distributors. And, by now, the distributors—the Indian distributors—had become imperative for us. At this time, I personally met each and every distributor coming to negotiate with Suresh Shah.

"Then our songs all got recorded and the distributors came back!"

THE SONGS OF *SHALIMAR*...AND THE KISHORE KUMAR CRISIS!

For music-director R.D. Burman—one of the two top music-directors in Indian films today—and for Anand Bakshi, the most popular and highest paid lyricist, the assignment to compose music for both the Hindi and the international versions of *Shalimar* was the most prestigious assignment in a long while.

In Indian films, remember, the music *wallahs* are doing nearly a hundred assignments simultaneously and mass-production methods allow them little margin for the luxury of giving innumerable sittings to any one film-maker. Yet, both R.D. and Anand Bakshi did just that for Krishna Shah, for the composition of the *Shalimar* songs.

The first number to be readied for composition was the *Cha-Cha-Cha* song. It was the result of several prolonged sittings and everyone was satisfied that it really was a catchy number.

"It was surprising," Krishna Shah said. "I think those people came to respect my judgment because nobody else in Indian movies ever made them give so many sittings! Sometimes after composing a song and finalizing it I'd meet them again the next day and tell Bakshi that it just didn't work. I'd say: 'Look, I may not know what the hell I'm doing. But I take the responsibility. If the song doesn't click, it's not your fault but mine. Let's scrap it and start again!'

"Actually, Bakshiji and R.D. and the lot of them could easily have told me to get lost, that they didn't want either me or my

money, but they didn't! They bore patiently with me. I'd visit them at 7 A.M. for our sittings and it'd go on for hours and hours.

"Then at night I'd make piles and-piles of notes about all that I wanted to say in a particular song. I'd sit up with the broken leg of mine in its spectacular plaster cast and listen to the music on tape."

They had scheduled the recording of two songs, one after the other, and this was done in the space of a fortnight. They had hired the Mehboob Studios Recording Theatre (where that veteran recordist, Robin Chatterjee, does stereophonic, multi-channel recording) for the *Shalimar* recordings and they were all locked-door sessions. No outsiders—and that included the press—were allowed inside.

And then, on the day of the very first song-recording the singer Kishore Kumar indulged in a tantrum that almost caused an explosion.

The most popular playback-singer of the seventies, Kishore Kumar came to films as a singer who popularized yodelling and pop singing, and then went on to become a popular star of the fifties. A singing star, naturally. His singing voice fitted Dev Anand, the matinee idol of the time (and later other stars as well), so well that Kishore's career as a playback singer went from strength to strength even as his career as a comic star dwindled.

In the fifties and sixties he assiduously built up a reputation for eccentricity. Incredible stories about secret doors and passages in his recluse mansion (where he lives alone with his now grown-up son who has also become an accepted playback and stage singer), and how he used them to escape from producers who called on him, flooded film-land.

To put the seal of authority on his own eccentricity, Kishore then turned to making movies produced, directed, written, acted, music-directed, sung and so forth, all by himself. Naturally,

"My behaviour that day may have appeared tyrannical to some," Krishna Shah said. "But I am not really a tyrant. After the Amitabh episode all of us developed a kind of '*what is fair is fair; what is not fair is not fair*' attitude to everything. In all our dealings and negotiations, fairness was given priority. We believed that once an agreement was made with a person, it was up to both of us to honour it. This attitude became very stiff after the Amitabh debacle.

"Thus when Kishore's secretary came up with his demand at the eleventh hour, even at that hour I was ready to postpone the take and find a substitute rather than bow down to his outrageous demands."

The song-situation, in the case of each song, is what inspired singers Lata Mangeshkar and Usha Iyer. Usha, an internationally famous singer of western songs, improvised a lot in the *Cha-Cha Cha* song, poured life and soul into it. Each and every piece of music and song had already been chalked out on paper in terms of visual action and *business*!

Lata Mangeshkar, that world-famous singing prodigy, was inspired by Krishna Shah too. "For one number," Krishna said, smiling, "Lata actually gave nine retakes and even R.D. was simply shivering with nervousness! Why? I'd inspired Lata about that particular song-situation and she herself wouldn't be satisfied until she was convinced that she'd given a perfect take."

Once the four songs were recorded and press photographs and news flooded all over the national press, the distributors recovered confidence in the project rapidly. Hand in hand with this, Amarjeet's advertising campaign was really causing a furore in Follywood.

At that time, on the eve of the commencement of the actual shooting of Shalimar, all the advertising of the film was distributor-oriented rather than audience-oriented.

"We were conscious throughout of our objectives, right then, in designing these ads," Krishna Shah said. "In no time at all

the big distributors were back again in the arena, negotiating like mad."

Film selling—like the entire film-business—is a matter of creating a craze, a psychosis. You make them mad first with want for something which seems suddenly to be the most desirable object around—like a sex-symbol—and then you skin them for the maximum you can get.

Right after the *Shalimar* *muhat* when Gina was here, for such a craze had been created and the distributors were panging for *Shalimar*. But Suresh Shah—intoxicated himself!—was turning all offers down because he wanted the highest sum available per territory. Suresh was so turned on by the *muhat* that he even refused an offer of forty-five lakhs for a territory!

After the songs were recorded the *Shalimar* craze burst again. And then, with top distributors bidding in the arena, the distributor made bold and belled the cat first.

He was Raj Kapoor's distributor, Vakil Singh of the Punjab circuit.

The rest was easy. And, as the countdown to 15 August 1977 began, Suresh Shah sold *Shalimar* at the highest price he had been dreaming about right from the start of the venture.

REX HARRISON VS THE BOMBAY CUSTOMS

The kind of trouble that Rex Harrison had with the Bombay Customs made headlines when the international star arrived in Bombay on 11 September 1977.

Many versions by many parties both interested and uninterested have been put forward—that Rex Harrison was drunk and abusive and so forth. But the fact remains that, in the end, no matter whose fault it really was, the real loser is not Rex Harrison, not the Customs officers actually involved in the embroglio, but India.

It's the kind of incident that practically every international star must have read about or heard of by now. Every international newspaper, from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Times*, the *London Times* and the *Guardian*, covered it. So catch any other big star coming to India for a long, long time.

Mani Mistri tells it best: "All arrangements for Rex's arrival had been made by Ronnie, who was also supposed to head the Reception Committee to welcome Rex at the airport. Krishna was by then already in Bangalore with his foreign as well as Indian crew, busy as hell with all the production arrangements for the shooting which he was hell-bent on starting on the announced date of 15 September.

"So far all the foreign technicians had been cleared by the Bombay Customs without any hitch. The Customs officials were all very nice people and hardly anyone's bags were checked.

Even our equipment had come smoothly through the regular channels and cleared without any hassles.

"Both Krishna and Ronnie had assured Rex Harrison of certain basic courtesies here in India. Rex is a super-celebrity, he's used to getting VIP treatment all over the world.

"In their earlier meetings with Rex, Ronnie had done his little act about the Maharajahs of India, about Air-India, the Taj and what-not. He had assured Rex that the Indian Government was eager that we do this picture, that it was a matter of international prestige for us, and so forth.

"Naturally, Rex was expecting something very great! Moreover, he had just then been in Yugoslavia, doing a picture, and been a house-guest of Marshal Tito himself! So you can imagine the kind of shock he must have got when he arrived in Bombay...

"Rex was coming with twenty-three pieces of baggage which included not only his personal effects but also the wardrobe he was going to use for *Shalimar*, plus the innumerable hats he was going to wear in the film.

"We let Rex select his own wardrobe because we wanted to take no chances on his not liking our selection. Rex had informed us beforehand about how much luggage he was carrying and said that most of the pieces were hat-boxes containing one or two hats each.

"The day before Rex's arrival we had had news from Bangalore about a fresh crisis there! Kenny Kocher—our Chief Production Manager—had taken ill suddenly and was removed to a hospital. And there were several hundred thousand rupees in cash in his possession!

"So Ronnie who was waiting in Bombay to receive Rex Harrison had to fly off to Bangalore to take charge of that cash, leaving me to hold the fort and to receive Sexy Rexy.

"We informed both Air-India, who were flying Rex, as well as the Customs authorities, of the flight number and arrival-time

of Rex's plane. Air-India naturally promised VIP treatment. Rex travelled first class and Air-India did give him VIP treatment in flight. The only way Rex, like so many air-travellers, can endure a long air journey is to take a few drinks, and he must have had a couple of bottles of champagne on board the plane, which is scarcely anything, quantity-wise, for Rex.

"Unfortunately for us, that particular day was Special Checking Day in Customs. At regular intervals higher-ups in the Customs hierarchy descend on the airport to see that the officers on duty are doing a thorough job of it.

"Bhupendra Shah and I went to the airport to receive Rex. I went to the Air-India Duty Officer for permission to be allowed into the Customs Enclosure. Normally, this is permitted without any undue hassle. But that day being a Special Checking Day, I was not permitted to enter.

"Air-India then informed the Assistant Collector of Customs on duty about Rex's arrival. That gentleman assured Air-India that they'd take good care of Rex, not to worry.

"The Air-India Jumbo carrying Rex and his friend Ms. Tinker, arrived at the ungodly hour of 3 A.M! It was very hot and humid. Outside, the monsoons were in full force and it was raining heavily. Indoors, it was hot, smoggy and very sweaty indeed.

"Rex's bags took a long time coming from the plane to the Customs Enclosure—nearly an hour and a half! He was tired and sleepy, and he just collapsed into a chair. Ms. Tinker, who was accompanying him, is an asthma patient and is medically advised against travel, but she couldn't help travelling because she had to accompany Rex to India. She was coughing terribly.

"When Rex's bags arrived in the Customs Enclosure at long last, he noticed that two of them were missing! He had twenty-three baggage-tags in his hand and only twenty-one items of baggage had arrived in Customs!

"Rex panicked!

"Imagine, suddenly to come from a very cold climate into a hot and sultry place, to be tired and sleepy and perspiring, and to wait for an hour and a half for your bags to come in from the plane—and then to cap it all, to find that two items of baggage are missing!

"Now, this is where the real story begins, with the loss of the two items of baggage.

"In one of those suitcases Rex was carrying his costume for the first day of the *Shalimar* shooting, while the other contained their bank statements, their cheque-books and other important papers. Try as they could the Air-India people simply weren't able to find those two bags. Moreover, right then, there wasn't any senior Air-India official around—only a girl from the Special Handling Section to serve them.

"Ms. Tinker got upset and made some remark about that girl, calling her stupid or something to that effect. This upset the girl, who burst into tears. Leaving their baggage-tags on the counter she walked out of the Customs Enclosure in a huff! Now, this was absolutely wrong. This the Air-India girl should *not* have done, no matter what the provocation, because she was Air-India's representative, she was Special Handling.

"Suddenly, nobody at all was around to help Rex and Ms. Tinker in a sea of strange and indifferent faces. Everyone was just staring at them like they were some prize specimens from the zoo or something.

"While all this was going on inside, Bhupendra and I were loitering helplessly outside! I was in tears! I could see all that was happening through the plateglass and there was not a thing either of us could do, not a damn thing!

"By now, Rex and Ms. Tinker were mad enough to be literally tearing their hair! Suddenly Rex stormed up and delivered what was literally his punch-line. He got up, came to the door and said, loud enough for many people to hear, '*Is there anyone from this fucking Company who'll come and help me out with*

this mess?

"Bhupendra and I quickly introduced ourselves and followed him inside. They tried to stop us at the Gate of course, but we simply pushed our way in after Rex.

"Bhupendra spotted Assistant Collector of Customs, Gehani, on duty. He went to Mr Gehani and pleaded with him to let Rex through. He did everything short of going down on his knees.

"He pleaded: 'Please let Rex go out. You examine whatever you want. Mani Mistri will stay behind with his baggage. You can open them all if you like. But Rex is tired. Let him out!'

"They turned a deaf ear to that and asked Rex to start opening his baggage. Rex simply put his keys on the counter and said: 'Go ahead! Open anything you like!'

"So the Official says: 'No. *You* pick up that bag and put it on the counter first.'

"Rex couldn't manage that, the bag was heavy. There were porters standing around and not one of them would come forward to lift Rex's bags to the counter, and the Customs Officers were just standing there with their arms folded.

"So Rex said: 'Alright, will someone please help me?' The Customs Officer replied: 'Sorry, we are not permitted to touch the baggage. The passenger has to put it on the counter himself.'

"At this Rex lost his cool and lapsed into profanity. 'What the fuck is going on?' he yelled. And the dam burst! 'Where the fucking hell are those producers, they promised me this, they promised me that, they promised me everything! Is this what they call VIP treatment?' and so on and so forth using foul and abusive language—but it was all directed at us, to the Company for whose work he'd come to India, in the first place. Not to the Customs.

"I went to him and said, 'Mr. Harrison, will you please let me have the keys and would you please go over there and sit down while I clear up all this?' He sat down quietly and

handed over the keys. But by that time Ms. Tinker had hit her own crescendo. She snapped, 'No! I don't want anybody to touch my baggage! I'll stand here and see what they're doing! I don't want anything messed up!'

"Ms. Tinker, I learned afterwards, had had her previous experiences of India. She has some Indian blood, I think. And she yelled at Rex and said: 'I told you so! We shouldn't have believed a word those two men told us in France! We should have made our own arrangements from the London Home Office! I told you it's like this in India! I told you the Indians...' etc! etc!

"This really annoyed those Customs guys and they reacted accordingly. 'Who the hell is she to speak like this about India? Who the hell does he think he is?' And everything started coming out about colonial attitudes and this and that.

"Rex was completely dazed.

"He suddenly seemed to age ten years in that Customs Enclosure. He said to me: 'I've been travelling all over the world for so many years now and I don't even touch my baggage! People just escort me out and my bags follow later. What in hell is happening here?' He simply couldn't believe it!

"Rex was carrying eight bottles of wine. Between the two of them they should have been allowed four bottles free of duty, and charged duty only on four because one is allowed to carry two bottles duty-free.

"But the Customs charged us something like a thousand rupees for those eight bottles and I simply put the cash on the counter and took Rex away. Somehow or other we managed to get all the bags out, dumped them in our waiting cars and drove off.

"It was the end of a nightmare—the kind of nightmare one wouldn't wish on one's worst enemy.

"Bhupendra was so embarrassed, he simply couldn't face Rex after all that had happened. He just got into his own car

and drove away from the airport. I went with Rex and Ms. Tinker in their car to the Taj.

"Rex seemed to be calming down in the car but Ms. Tinker was again after him: 'That Ronnie Singh, that so and so! Who the hell is he? I'm beginning to doubt his *bona fides*. Who the hell is Krishna Shah? If this is how they manage their country what kind of a fucking movie are they going to make?'

"That hurt badly, but I simply kept my mouth shut.

"That drive soothed Rex tremendously. From Santa Cruz to the Taj at the other end of Bombay, passing Marine Drive—the Queen's Necklace as it is called—it's wonderful, early in the morning. Rex's mood changed completely. He was soon himself again—but Ms. Tinker refused to be consoled! She kept snapping and grumbling and complaining right from the airport to the Taj.

"Finally, Rex himself stopped her with a laugh: 'Come on darling! Let's be reasonable! After all, who taught them this bureaucracy? Our own forefathers!'

"Then he says to me: 'I hope there'll be some champagne at the hotel, Miss?' I knew there was some white wine chilling in the fridge in his suite and I told him so. I said I'd try and get some champagne too.

"Oh, marvellous!' he exclaimed. 'I'm hungry now! I hope you'll prepare some snacks for me!'

"The Taj always keeps its representative at the airport, to receive every flight. When Rex arrived, their man was there and he'd been a witness to all that had happened. He rang up the Taj and warned them that Rex was arriving, but in one helluva black mood!

"By the time we reached the hotel, it was 5.30 A.M. and dawn was breaking.

"Rex got out of the car and rushed into the hotel. The Manager, the Reception Committee, were waiting there to receive him with flowers and garlands. They all looked terribly

gloomy, anticipating Rex's continued annoyance. But Rex charmed them and everyone was smiling and gushing. I took one of the Managers aside and told him Rex needed some excellent snacks and a bottle of champagne at once!

"I took Rex up to his suite. By the time Rex settled in and the champagne and snacks arrived, it was 6.30 A.M. and Rex was in his element once again. He loved the Rajput Suite. He went around touching everything and exclaiming: 'Oh, marvellous! Marvellous!' He was as excited as a child with a new toy. The suite has a swing facing the harbour and he went and sat on it, calling out to Ms. Tinker: 'Come here, darling. Come and sit on this swing. I feel like a Maharajah!'

"His mood changed completely. Then I told him: 'Mr. Harrison, why don't you rest? I'll put a call through to Mr. Shah and inform him that you are here!' He replied: 'Yes, of course. But don't you worry, dear. You must be tired. You go and sleep and don't disturb us till one o'clock.'

"I went to my room and put an SOS call through to Krishna at once. 'You're required here immediately!' I told him. Because at the airport Rex had said: 'Will you kindly take me across to the International Lounge and put me on the next plane back to London?' He had even said: 'Don't touch my baggage. Just put it all back on the next plane to London!'

"Krishna wanted to send Ronnie down by himself but I said: 'God no! They'll tear him apart!' After all that Ms. Tinker had said about Ronnie, I just couldn't let the poor guy face them alone! Rex needed Krishna's kind of cajoling. *He needed the director, not the producer, to charm him out of his depression.*

"Meanwhile, we hit the panic-graph yet again!

"We had arranged a press conference, a TV interview, a radio interview, things like that for Rex. I just couldn't see my way to cancelling all that. The press of the entire country knew exactly when Rex Harrison was arriving in Bombay. They were all very eager to meet in person the Professor Higgins whom

they'd known for years, on the screen.

"I had to make strong security arrangements with the Taj in order not to let any pressman—or woman—get close to him. I had to keep a Steward outside his room, round-the-clock, to keep gate-crashers out, and I had to give strict instructions to the Taj telephone operators not to put any direct calls through to his suite."

Then Krishna Shah rushed back to Bombay and Mani Mistri gratefully transferred the burden of the latest crisis on to his accommodating shoulders.

"When I realized how hysterical Mani Mistri was on the phone," Krishna Shah said. "I knew we had a very major crisis on our hands. We were on the eve of starting the shooting and if Rex Harrison took the next plane back to London, we'd had it!

"Ronnie was in sheer panic all the way to Bombay! I was cool. Over the years I have developed certain techniques which are part Zen, part Akido, part Karate. This has taught me how to take a blow and convert its anti-velocity into a pro-factor. It's a strategy by which you convert the energy directed against you into working for you.

"I'd spoken to Bhupendra about the situation and our biggest fear was the press. If we cancelled the press conference and the other exclusive interviews, we'd get a very bad press. *At that moment all the bad things that people had said to me about making a movie in India, came back to me in a rush. It was a bitter moment, of having to face the fact that all of them were right and you were wrong.*

"Ronnie and I drove straight from Santa Cruz Airport to the Taj. Ronnie was quaking with fear and I reassured him. I gave him a measure of my own confidence, of my own techniques in handling such situations.

"Both of us entered Rex's suite at the Taj.

"At that moment the only advantage I had over Ronnie was that unlike him, I hadn't done the Maharajah number with Rex and Ms. Tinker. How Rex abused and cursed Ronnie! He simply pulled out all the stops and barged into him! It was a long and terrible tirade and he ended up with the threat, 'When I go back to Hollywood and London, I'll tell them all about you! I'll see that you never make another picture again!'

"We both kept absolutely quiet and allowed him to have his say.

"Then I spoke very calmly to him. I said: 'I understand how you feel, Mr. Harrison. A terrible thing has happened, but we can't change the situation. We cannot rewrite the past. Tell me: how do you feel about the picture? Do you want to do the picture?'

"He stared at me. I think he was totally unprepared that I put it to him, bare and bold like that! He looked at me, then he said: 'Let me discuss my role with you.'

"At that moment I knew, and Rex knew I knew, that the crisis was over."

Turning their backs on the storm just passed, both Rex Harrison and Krishna Shah immersed themselves in a discussion on Sir John's role. Rex had certain reservations, certain different ideas about Sir John's character. For instance, he thought that Sir John should be introduced at the very beginning of the film. They now developed the whole thing from this point of view. Then they went into detail on the psychology of Sir John.

"We had," said Krishna Shah, "a forty-five minute long esoteric discussion—and I deliberately use that word—full of psychological insights on the character of Sir John. "

By the end of that discussion Krishna Shah had charmed Rex Harrison back into being his usual urbane, expansive and tolerant self again! Rex is an interesting, a volatile conversationalist and at that time, with the Customs ugliness behind them, the

two of them talked about paintings, about sex, about money, about Hollywood and Follywood. They went into the psychology of the other characters in *Shalimar* as well.

At the end of the discussion, after many hours had passed, Rex Harrison stood up and said off-handedly: "Ronnie, I forgive you."

Ronnie Singh stood up too, and they embraced one another. *Shalimar* was safe again.

NEXT STOP: BANGALORE

The Customs crisis with Rex Harrison caught Krishna Shah off-guard and made him hurriedly alter some important plans he'd made for the start of the *Shalimar* shooting.

For one thing, all the press, television and radio coverage for Rex Harrison was called off, because distorted versions of what had happened in the Customs Enclosure had willy-nilly crept into the three major dailies of Bombay.

The original plan had been to detain Rex in Bombay a couple of days and give him the full treatment, publicity-wise. That was out of the question now, so they hurriedly put him on the earliest plane and rushed him off to Bangalore. At that moment, the further they kept the press from Rex Harrison, the better, and who could blame them?

For another thing, the plan to transport important film-journalists from all over India to Bangalore on a *Shalimar* jaunt to cover the shooting first-hand had to be summarily dropped too—and a number of film-journalists were distinctly disappointed. They had been looking forward to the jaunt. But Rex didn't want the press anywhere near him.

Krishna Shah was amazed at what had happened in Customs. "The *Times of India* came out with a report of the incident which was very derogatory to Rex," Krishna Shah said. "I was absolutely enraged with the Customs and was determined not to let them get away with this.

"As for Rex Harrison, we were also amazed at the two utterly

opposite poles of his personality. When Ronnie and I entered his suite Rex was heaping profanities on Ronnie—and it was one jolly crescendo of words like ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’ and ‘mother-fucker’! Rex’s profanity is matched only by mine! These profanities come to the surface in a long discussion with Rex and his intermingling of cuss-words with his high-falutin’ English sounds ridiculous! I can understand how shocking it could sound to an outsider!

“Rex’s profanity was also something which shocked the Customs people. They were really dumb-struck to hear their beloved Professor Higgins of My Fair Lady using the word ‘fuck!’

“This was one of the reasons why I scrapped our plans to take the press to Bangalore. I am very profane on the sets. All of us were. While the British and the Americans were matching one another with their profanity, the Indians were simply keeping quiet! They were all shocked!”

It was Krishna Shah diverting Rex Harrison into a discussion on his role in *Shalimar* that had saved the day. Rex had become excited about his role and he insisted on going along to Bangalore immediately with Krishna.

The next morning, accompanied by the charming, young Sherezade Pandey—a P.R. girl retained by Mani Mistri—exclusively to take care of Rex Harrison and Ms. Tinker, the big star flew down to Bangalore.

The stage was set for the commencement of *Shalimar*.

departure from Image.

"Between the time I finished recording the *Shalimar* songs and before I arrived in Bangalore to start the actual shooting," Krishna Shah told me, "I had a unique experience. I had to meet Vakil Singh, our Punjab distributor several times during our finalizing and then signing the first distribution agreement for the East Punjab territory.

"It was then that I learned a great deal about Hindi cinema and the Indian cinemagoers' likes and dislikes. Though it wasn't, strictly speaking, my job to project this package to the Indian distributors, yet I took a personal hand in it because Suresh Shah was in London right then doing my work and I knew that if the picture wasn't sold fast—the Hindi version, I mean—it'd cause all kinds of problems. So I'd be doing Suresh's work of meeting all kinds of distributors all the time and discussing with them.

"I'd tell them the story; I'd play the tapes of our songs to them; and I'd listen to them asking important questions. Questions, I mean, that were important to them.

'Is there emotion in the picture?'

'What kind of action do you have?'

'What sort of songs are there, and how many?'

"All this time I was learning about the Indian market. I'd ask them for their suggestions and quite frequently I have incorporated a suggestion from the distributors here and there!"

Krishna Shah's Second Unit Director, his Stunt Coordinator and other crew had all arrived from abroad. They'd arrived two weeks before the shooting started. They engaged an Indian stunt coordinator too, and all of them used to sit around having long rap sessions.

By that time *Shalimar* was the most important film-project in India in 1977 and they had gone far above their on-paper budget.

"The publicity had projected us to such gigantic proportions,"

Krishna Shah confessed, *"that I simply had to succeed. And I had only three months to bring into my footage all the masala, all the box-office ingredients needed for Hindi film audiences. I had to have the biggest dance ever choreographed, with two hundred dancers, and it was going to be bigger than even the Chandralekha dance!"*

To make production easier—remember, Krishna Shah had virtually taken on the challenging job of making not *one* but *two* motion-pictures in that three-month period from September 1977 to December 1977—he thought of keeping as close as possible to one track for both versions. As soon as he reached Bangalore, he went into a huddle with his army of American, British and Indian technicians and sat with more than three thousand sketches prepared for the film, discussing, developing new ideas.

In those pre-commencement days Bangalore became the Shalimar city. Virtually half the residential hotels in town, from the prestigious Ashoka—which housed the stars—to Hotel Bangalore International which housed the technicians and the Ramon House administrators, to lesser hotels which housed the production staff, were full of people who arrived in Bangalore to work in one connection or other on the film. The foreign technicians however, tolerated Hotel Bangalore International for only a week. Then they insisted on being transferred to the Ashoka where they could swim and live in better style.

With an incredibly over-staffed unit of four hundred members it became necessary to issue identity cards for them all. Expectedly, with so many people to dog-tag, there were bound to be some mistakes. The funniest of them was the Chief Assistant Director's dog-tag which read: DAVID WILSON: FIRST UNIT DICTATOR.

"Each one of us had a specific job to do," Krishna Shah explained to me. "And my job at that time was not only to prepare myself for the monumental task ahead of me, but to train all my most important technicians in terms of my concep-

tion and my philosophy regarding work.

"A sense of responsibility and a proper handling of the problems of communication between the Indians and the Westerners was most imperative. *This pre-shooting period was a period of assessment when everybody was sizing up everybody else.* Among the technicians of course, there wasn't any big problem, because they have something in common. Their work is like gravity, it brings them together, and holds them together, wherever they go. Though the language is different there was a common goal and everyone is interested in studying everybody else's method of work and they'd spend lots of time together comparing notes.

"I was worrying a lot about how the relationship between the foreigners and the Indians would work out because I'd had my own experience with Jackie Cooper, who had behaved badly at the airport. He refused to travel in an Ambassador car and he was threatening to go back to England.

"I had a long talk with Jackie and told him that while he was in India, he was supposed to represent his own country. What he did, the way he behaved, would reflect not merely on him as an individual, but as an Englishman.

"In this way I had personal briefings with each and every technician. *Being essentially an American director and also being Indian-born, it was easier for me to be constantly swapping identities. With the Indian technicians, I would become the man with the Gandhi cap and with foreign technicians I was the typical Yankee!*"

Even in this area, *Shalimar* was not without its crisis—albeit a minor one!

Peter Sutton, the Sound Recordist from England, wanted to go back home because he would not accept an Indian technician as his "boom" man. One unit member commented: "Some of the foreign technicians were not only rude, but crude. Especially Peter Sutton of the Sound Department." Here, Krishna had a lever and he used it unabashedly: he had been Secretary of the

Directors' Guild of America.

He called David Wilson, told him what was brewing and asked him to inform Sutton to play ball or else he'd have a story in *Variety*, derogatory to Sutton, which would affect his career. It was just an implied threat; Krishna would never dream of carrying it out. But such strategies often helped him to get things done!

Sutton played ball and the crisis passed.

"This crisis was due to the preconceived notions many foreigners have, that Indian technicians know nothing," Krishna commented: "Later we discovered that Srivastava [the boom man] is as good as Peter Sutton and the next time I don't even need to bring Sutton to India. Srivastava knows as much about *mixing* as Sutton does. As a matter of fact, during the last three weeks of shooting, I was able to dispense with quite a few foreign technicians early, and could use their Indian counterparts who were all excellent."

THE FIRST DAYS

Thursday, 15 September 1977

It looked that morning like all roads led to the Chamundi Studios in the heart of the city. When I arrived at the Studio myself there was frantic activity everywhere. I went on the sets; Krishna was busy lighting up the shot.

I noticed Rex Harrison and his companion, Ms. Tinker, seated together on a sofa on the sets. Rex seemed to be jumpy while the still-photographers took candid shots, and I attributed that not only to the trauma of his recent experience in Customs, but also to the fact that Mani Mistri had warned me: "Strictly no pictures of Rex without his toupee! He's very touchy about his balding head!"

I remembered Ronnie Singh having brought back a few candid photographs of the three of them—Rex, Ronnie, and Krishna—taken at Rex's villa in Nice when they'd gone there to negotiate the *Shalimar* deal with him. I thought they'd make a good press release, but no! Rex wasn't wearing his toupee in those informal shots, so publishing them was out!

The *muhurat* for taking the first shot was given as 12.45 P.M. but the actual *muhurat* took place some ten minutes later—not a bad delay in an industry where such delays usually run into hours.

In the main hall set where, later, the dome covering the ruby would be kept, the pandit had arranged some idols of gods and goddesses with flowers, vermilion, *prasad*, etc. Rex and Ms.

Tinker watched nonchalantly while the priest chanted the Sanskrit *slokas*. Shooting his tongue like a machine-gun the priest prattled away while distributing flowers and *pedhas* to the important-looking foreign crew members, who didn't know what to do with them! (A little earlier, the delectable Sherezade Pandey—who had come to the sets with Sexy Remy and Tinker Belle—had given some foreign crew members a rose each and a kiss each and they jolly well knew what to do with that!)

After the *muhurat* ceremony was over everyone was given a *laddoo* each (pronounced *laydu* by the foreign unit members, setting the East-West flavour right from the outset). Some of them were quite obviously unaware of what one does with a *laydu* and they carried it around quite self-consciously until the girls on the set helped to shove them in their mouths, sharing half with them!

All the cameras were covered with garlands and Harvey Jenkins, the First Unit Director of Photography had affixed at least four roses in front of the Panavision camera! When Harvey peered through the viewfinder, it must have afforded him yet another quaint picture of an East-West mix: a fair-skinned American in jeans peering through a sophisticated movie-camera with Indian religious symbols (those garlands), hanging around its neck!

Dharmendra was present, too. He was needed for the first shot, and immediately after the religious formalities were over, Krishna Shah lined up the action.

Dharam, in a white-and-black checked costume ~~matching the~~ white-and-black checked walls of the room into which he is stealthily creeping in order to pinch the great ~~Shah~~ *Shah*, must move very deliberately across the floor which also looks like a gigantic chessboard of white and black squares. ~~Nothing~~ took Dharam through the rehearsal and he was ~~made to move~~ his head rhythmically first right, then left, so as to ~~merge~~ completely with the design on the wall as he ~~crept along it~~

In his excitement Krishna was yelling: "One-two-three-Flip! One-two-three-Flip!" to give Dharam a proper sense of timing so that on each move he made from white square to black square to white again and onwards, he matched the colour of the particular square he happened to be on.

Conscious of the fact that *Shalimar* was his first international movie assignment, Dharmendra was all keyed-up and raring to go.

But the start was somewhat jumpy. First there was the tension of meeting and having to face the redoubtable Rex Harrison and though (as always) Dharam kept his normal grinning exterior, there was a lot of tension coiling up inside. And second, there was the matter of his first day's costume.

The first shot was of Kumar (Dharmendra) creeping past some of Sir John's palace guards, dressed in a weird costume alternately segmented in black and white squares, and wearing a hood of the same design.

The moment he arrived on set, internationally famous photographer, the Delhi-based O.P. Sharma, who had been signed on to do the *Shalimar* stills, went forward to take pictures. Dharam protested mildly: "Why do you want to take pictures in this costume and make-up? Take them when I remove them." Whether he protested because he thought he looked ridiculous or because the costume would give away the climax of the movie, is not known.

If anything, Dharam was, at the start of the shooting, overzealous and inclined to lean forward much more than was either necessary or desirable. This was especially true in the case of his action shots. Though they had one of Hollywood's best stunt men, Jackie Cooper, on the *Shalimar* assignment to double for Dharam, our Dharmendra was anxious to establish that Indians were second to none. *Anything the foreigners could do, we Indians could do as well, if not better!*

And this is what caused the first major crisis in the shooting.

THE CRISIS OF DHARAM'S BACK

"During the first week of shooting," Krishna Shah said. "I was doing action sequences and Dharam as usual wanted to impress everybody by doing his action scenes himself.

"I had Jackie Cooper, the world's Number One stunt man to double for him and he moves five times faster than Dharam. But Dharam has this hang-up: 'If he can do it, I can do it better!'

"In picture-making in the West we do not allow our principal stars to do their own stunts because all pictures are heavily insured and I know that if the stars do their own stunts, they somehow botch the whole damn thing!

"I had some very bad experiences of this nature while doing television shows. James Earl Jones, star of *The River Niger* wanted to do his own stunts too, but I wouldn't let him.

"But Dharmendra begged me so much that I finally gave in. I let him do a sequence where he has to fall flat on the floor and then wriggle forward. This shot was being done in the Gem Room on the very first day of shooting.

"Jackie Cooper showed Dharam how to fall, so now our Dharam simply has to do it better than him! Now, Dharam does not have fantastic coordination of physical movement of the sort that a professional stuntman does. He sprained his back a little and it looked as if I'd have to cancel the shooting for a few days.

"If I cancelled the shooting I'd be able to put in a claim, be-

cause I was insured, and I'd be able to collect something like five lakhs of rupees per day for not being able to shoot.

"In any event we couldn't shoot anything else, because the other sets weren't ready and neither were Shammi Kapoor nor O.P. Ralhan around. And everyone was of the opinion that I should cancel the shooting and put in a claim.

"Ronnie Singh also told me so and I even went so far as to inform our London office on long-distance that I may put in a claim since we were legitimately and fully insured.

"And then I decided against it.

"Why?

"I discussed this matter with Suresh Sethi (who had arrived in Bangalore to be present at the start of the shooting and he told me that he'd back me up, no matter what decision I made.

"Right at that time we were very short on pounds—pounds money—not pounds weight!) and if I'd ~~decided to put in a claim~~ have been paid in pounds. But when I weighed the ~~claim~~ ^{pros and cons} it would happen to the morale of the unit, I decided against the money.

"I decided immediately that we'd continue shooting ~~without~~ Dharmendra. I'd carry on with the action sequences and ~~have~~ ^{bring} forth no actor or actress would be allowed to do any scenes themselves!

"My decision was a great disappointment to the ~~actors~~ and Britishers on the team. They'd all made plans to go shopping and all, thinking that I'd definitely ~~cancel the shooting~~.

"I decided not to spill the news about Dharmendra's back. There was this psychological factor at work ~~which~~ ^{that} was taking into account, that when the head of the family falls in the ~~house~~ household goes to pieces.

"The picture *Exorcist* ~~was a big success~~ ^{was a big success} and I was a big thing. Therefore I decided to ~~ignore Dharmendra's back~~ proceed with shooting. Dharmendra ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~convinced~~ ^{convinced} and he confessed to me that the problem had ~~been solved~~ ^{been solved}.

before coming down to Bangalore to start *Shalimar*, he had sprained his back a little while doing some strenuous exercises to lose weight. At that time, incidentally, both Dharam and I were on a diet and we'd frequently compare notes. Dharam was looking terrific, trim, neat and with no fat at all on him.

"Anyway..."

"About a week later, when we had resumed work with Dharam and started shooting the dialogue scenes, I'd notice that in between shots Dharam would just disappear. He'd excuse himself saying that he was either going to the bathroom or to his make-up room. Actually, he'd go to an adjoining room, lie down and rest.

"I found this very strange, but since Dharam himself wouldn't say anything, I simply kept quiet. And then one day cinematographer Harvey Genkins came up to me and said that he'd heard rumours circulating among the crew that *Shalimar* would never be completed.

"Harvey was very close to the Indian technicians and he'd heard them whispering that something was radically wrong with Dharmendra, that he was in acute agony. But he wasn't saying a word to anyone about it. He was just going on and on acting!"

"Three or four days later it got worse and he was really sick, but still he wouldn't tell a soul! He kept insisting when asked, that it was merely a minor sprain and he didn't need to see a doctor. And actually, he hadn't seen a doctor, even on his own, till then.

"Harvey told me that the whole crew knew about Dharam's illness and they were panicking. I observed Dharam carefully and one day when I caught him resting in a side room off the sets, I went and accosted him about it. He tried to make light of it but I refused to believe him and insisted on taking him to the doctor that very evening.

"When we arrived at the doctor's, Dharam tried to trick him too by doing all the exercises which he was asked to! He

must surely have been in severe pain, but he didn't show it. The Doctor, seeing Dharam do the exercises, said that it would be enough if he rested for three or four days, as it wasn't a major ailment.

"I didn't smell anything fishy in this, because my wife Diane had gone through a similar problem and I was aware that backache can be cured by exercises, unlike a slipped disc.

"The following week however, instead of getting better, Dharam got worse. Dr. Srinivasan now examined him thoroughly and it was discovered that he was only a few days away from a slipped disc. He had not followed either the exercise or the rest instructions carefully; he was so keen on *Shalimar* that he thought he could take everything in his stride in the interest of his work.

"By then there was an excessive gloom pervading the entire crew, who had lost all hope that the picture would be completed. Some of them even took to drinking heavily at night because they knew that Dharam's condition was critical and that if anything happened to him, they'd all be dispensed with.

"Hema Malini was in Bangalore then, shooting for *Janta Hawaldar* and one day I spoke to Dharam in the presence of Hema. I said:

"'Look here, Dharam! I'm covered by insurance which leaves me the option to re-shoot the picture two or three months later, if I have to. So don't be worried about me. Tell me the truth.'

"Diane too remonstrated with Dharam, relating to him the similar experience she'd gone through some years before. Only then did he really open up and admit that he was in very bad shape and that he shouldn't have worked these past six days.

"I assured Dharam that I'd not replace him, I'd reshoot the picture later, if need be, but he would continue to be the star of the film.

"The very next night I received a telex message informing me that my cheque in payment of the insurance premium from

the New York office had not yet gone to Lloyds of London, and that hence my insurance wasn't valid! I went cold at the news, but kept mum about it! Only Mani Mistri knew. It was sheer bad luck that the lady in charge at the New York banker's office had gone on vacation locking up her table drawer, and all our papers were in that drawer! That meant I wasn't in any position to claim any dues from Lloyds!

"I said nothing to Dharam. I knew that if his back collapsed now, everything would be lost. We dared not tell even Suresh Shah about this Lloyds calamity. We had to summon Ronnie Singh back—he was in Delhi then—and inform him of what had happened. And all this time Diane would be sitting with Dharmendra, talking to him, reasoning with him. More than anything else Dharmendra needed reassurance during those black days! We all knew that he must not panic, must not lose hope, for then everything would really go *kaput*!

"On a Monday when I was free, the three of us—Dharmendra, Hema Malini and I—went to see another doctor. He was Dr. Murthy, a senior man, who had been Dr. Srinivasan's professor. During our conversation with Dr. Murthy I learned that he was both a disciple and a close friend of Dr. Hans Claus who is the world's renowned authority on back problems in the States. He had treated Diane. He had written all kinds of books on back problems. This Doctor had actually told Diane, after she recovered from her back-trouble the year before last and on the eve of our first visit to India, that he had a disciple here in India, in New Delhi.

"I was painfully aware of being in the midst of a very major crisis. I had no insurance. I had nothing to fall back on. But I went on working doggedly. I went on shooting every day, refusing to contemplate even for a moment the bad side of things.

"I had a long talk with Hema in which I made her aware of the seriousness of Dharam's situation and told her that if this

man does not take care of himself in the next two weeks, he'll become a cripple for life.

"But Dharam's sole obsession right then was Shalimar and on doing better than everybody else in it.

"I am sure any other actor in Dharmendra's place, faced with a similar predicament, would have bowed out of the picture. But not Dharam. He was like a man obsessed.

"I knew that if he remained obstinate, with the best intentions in the world, *Shalimar* would be destroyed and four hundred people thrown out of work, and he'd be crippled for life. That's why finding Dr. Murthy in Bangalore was a stroke of solid good luck.

"After Dr. Murthy examined Dharam, he informed us that there was only one way of salvaging his physical condition. That was by giving him a particular injection. He warned us that this injection does not work every time. I was the only person to whom Dr. Murthy said this. *And Hema Malini was the only person I told this to. Dharam had nobody in the world by his side right then, nobody of his own, that is, except Hema Malini. . .*

"The decision to take the injection was made. Arrangements at the hospital were finalised. We went to the hospital in two cars—Hema and Dharam in one car; Kenny Kochar, Dr. Srinivasan and I in the other. Within moments of our driving into the hospital gates a crowd of thousands flocked there to see their favourite stars—how they got wind of our arrival, God alone knows!"

At that time all the major (also minor) fan magazines were carrying controversial stories about Dharam having broken off his long-standing relationship with Hema, and having latched on to Zeenat. How wrong they were. The public of course knew that their favourites' hearts were still in the right place—and as usual the public were right. Dharam and Hema were still very close to each other indeed, and for what now follows, full marks

go to Hema for her loyalty and her humane consideration above and beyond the call of duty.

"Hema and I sat talking while the Doctor examined Dharam", Krishna Shah continued. "We talked about everything under the sun, except him. Hema told me about her life as a dancer and an actress and what it feels like to be a star. Both of us, as though by tacit consent, avoided talking about the present crisis.

"The whole atmosphere was so casual one would think that Dharam was just having a routine check-up inside. Yet we were both very much aware of the grimness of the situation. The Dharam-Hema relationship is very much like the Katherine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy relationship. They are deeply in love and I could see what a rich relationship their's is.

"And all this while I was dying within me. I knew I had no insurance. What happened inside would determine whether I had the picture or whether I'd lost the picture. There was nothing else to do but keep calm.

"After the examination was over Dr. Murthy called me inside and said that Dharam had to stop shooting. He also told me about the latest medical advances for this ailment, and about a particular spinal injection which is used in such cases. It's a kind of a booster which works in perhaps five or ten cases out of a hundred. Medical science, Dr. Murthy informed me, does not yet know how exactly this injection works, but they know that it works sometimes. Dr. Murthy also told me that there would be no side effects. It was an injection of the spine. . .

"Now I had to take a decision. Either we give Dharam this injection and take our chances on whether it works, or we forget about the whole thing and just go on working for as long as possible.

"Dharam left the decision to me. His family weren't there at the time. Hema was his only family, so I discussed it with her.

called her into Dr Murthy's cabin and told her everything. We laid all three alternatives squarely before her. I wanted her to share my responsibilities in making this decision. I knew the serious repercussions that could occur if I took one false step on my own.

"Hema and Dr. Murthy both being South Indians were chatting away in their own tongue. Finally, a solution was arrived at. It was decided that the best thing to do was to let Dharam take the injection.

"He was to be given the injection, plus radio-therapy, plus some exercises: a three-pronged attack on the malady. Hema took the responsibility to see that he'd carry out the exercises every day.

"The Doctor got ready immediately.

"The administration of this shot is almost like minor surgery. The patient is taken to the operation theatre, his body is shaved, things like that. Well, while they were getting Dharam ready like this, the Doctor kept Hema and me outside. In no time at all he came out again. *Dharam had requested that Hema should stand by his side while the Doctor administered the injection.*

"Now, according to hospital regulations, no outsider is allowed into the operation theatre for fear of infection, disturbance and other negative factors. *But Dharam simply refused to take the spinal injection unless Hema was present by his side.*

"When Dr. Murthy told me this, I said: "Yes please, do it as he wishes. Put her somewhere where she wouldn't be in your way; but let her be with him." Dr. Murthy was a tough man, but he agreed eventually.

"And Dharmendra took that injection as though he was taking an ordinary B-complex or an anti-pain injection. He took the whole thing without a wince or a cry of pain. Then eventually it was all over and we headed back home, as though nothing had happened. *Nothing was...*

"The next day I met Dr. Murthy again and he told me...

Dharam act. Do not deprive him of acting. Psychologically it would be bad for him.'

So that evening I did an acting process with him. In this acting process you create a space. I had done this once or twice before. In creating a space, one accepts whatever problems one has. One does not try to fight them; the problems are accepted as a part of oneself. So I did acting exercises with Dharam for two hours. At the end of it all he said he was feeling okay. He said he would accept his back problem without trying to fight it.

"This acting process is part meditation, part auto-suggestion part talking about the problem and part recreating it. It's all this combined, and it works.

"Hema on her part cooperated splendidly. She was in Bangalore for a long spell of shooting and she requested a few days off especially to keep an eye on Dharam.

"Dharam was given a corset to wear and he had to take radio-therapy every day. He was constantly asked to relax. But, incorrigible fellow, Dharam just two weeks later wanted to do his own stunts again!

"Then good times came back. We heard from Lloyds of London that they would honour our Insurance Agreement and not bother about the premium cheque being late, and we could make whatever claim we liked. *But we didn't need to claim anything because our shooting continued as usual.* The crisis of Dharam's back was kept such a strict secret that even today the unit members, by and large, do not have any idea of how grave it was. Except for my wife Diane, Mani Mistri and Kenny Kochar, and my secretary, Malvika Khanna, nobody knew a thing about it.

"After the injection, getting Dharam to rest was a big problem. The unit members didn't know about the injection, only that he needed to rest because of a strained back. So they'd all take turns to go and sit with him and cheer him up. O.P. Ralhan was best at this. He'd spend all his spare time in

Dharam's make-up room.

"Hema 'would see to it that he did his exercises every day. She stayed continuously with him for nearly ten days to keep an eye on him. She saw to it that he slept on a special bed every night, and did his exercises regularly morning and night. She'd visit the set while he was shooting.

"I tell you, Hema was just fantastic! Her love for him is insurmountable. I have great respect for her because to me she is a very classy lady."

THE DRAMAS OF SHOOTING

The *Shalimar* caravan carried four hundred and fifty members—a fantastically large production team, by any standards. And that's not counting the stars and the major personalities connected with the movie. Added to this was the fact that this was a mukiracial and multinational team—there were Americans, Englishmen as well as Indians and you can understand tempers being at explosion point most of the time, especially when things didn't seem to be going well.

As a result, profane language became a kind of safety-valve, a way of working-off pent-up anger and frustration. On the very third day of shooting Harvey Genkins was overheard saying that he hadn't heard from his wife in the last five days “and you can imagine my fucking condition”!

Quite definitely, “fuck” and “shit” were the favourite words of the foreign unit.

Dharam's back had set them behind schedule somewhat and most of the unit was grumbling about the waste of time. Each shot was taking three to four hours in preparation, on an average. The night shooting which was to have commenced on the night of 18 September, was cancelled at the last moment, because there is frequent power failure in Bangalore.

Dharam and O.P. Ralhan were their usual friendly selves while Zeenat, who'd stolen Gina's thunder at the *mulurat*, repeated

her performance when she appeared on the sets for the first time. Sylvia, needless to say, resented this greatly.

In one scene Zeenat, Dharam, O.P. Ralhan, John Saxon, and Sylvia Miles were all required. Sylvia was in a revealing costume as usual. But when Zeenat walked on to the sets, every male was left gaping!

Looking gorgeous with her shoulder-length hair and in a very low-cut evening gown, Zeenat had a different impact on the different men present! Her effect on O.P. Ralhan, for instance, was to work him up to a frenzy of dirty, dirty wisecracks throughout the shooting! Dharam on his part was noticed stealing frequent lusty glances at her, while Harvey Jenkins, walking resignedly back to his cameras sighed, "Wow! What boobs! There's gonna be *some* shooting today!"

A grinning Krishna Shah watched Tom Brumberger, the Special Effects man, who had by now become Zeenat's make-up man (or was that, too, supposed to be "special effects"?), rushing up to Zeenat altogether too often to "touch up" her lips or face!

And Zeenat? Taking it all in her stride, she turned once quite innocently to Tom Brumberger and said: "I wonder, should I have some more make-up on my...er.... body?" while glancing down her décolletage!

Zeenat was loved by one and all, during the making of the film. It is not known what Ms. Tinker felt about her. But Zeenat charmed Rex Harrison so completely that they dropped all other chatty little notes quite frequently in the years they were together in Bangalore.

Dharam, however, didn't react in quite the same way as Rexy as did Zeenat. As a matter of fact, there was something at the start of shooting, a great deal of tension between him and Rex who had, perhaps subconsciously, brought the typical East India Company attitude with him to Bangalore. He tended to look down his nose at the natives, both when English manners and acting were concerned.

Rex made this quite evident, one day, soon after he and Dharmendra had done their English-language shots together. "Krishna," he said, "aren't you going to dub his English?"

Krishna, a past-master at the game of one-upmanship, retorted, "No! Why should I?"

Then he went on to explain to Rex that though the Englishman has this thing about British diction, accents of a wide variety are generally accepted in America. Americans love accents. They're charmed by them. Look how popular Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida had become in the States. Both of them spoke English with a heavy Italian accent. Likewise the French actors and actresses—they spoke English with a thick French accent. It wasn't a minus point—on the contrary, it was their plus point. They stood out because of it.

But that explanation didn't stop Rex from being snooty about Queen's English. In fact, he annoyed Dharmendra quite frequently; remember Dharam, right then, was not only struggling with a bad back, he was struggling with his English lessons as well, for Krishna Shah had first (before the shooting began) put Pearl Padamsee on to Dharmendra to rehearse his English accent and later (in Bangalore, during the shooting) put in Mrs. Behroze Mody—wife of India's ace make-up man, Sarosh Mody—to help Dharmendra speak his English dialogue correctly.

And every night after shooting was finished for the day, however exhausted they were, O.P., Dharam and Behroze would meet in O.P.'s suite and have these English-dialogue sessions. O.P. too had a problem with English because he spoke with a typical Punjabi accent and in the film he needed to have a South Indian accent! O.P. was getting gloriously mixed up with both accents! He learnt a lot through sheer imitative ability; so did Dharam. Both of them would take down the pronunciations of the English words in Urdu and then mug them up. This the foreigners found very funny! Yeah, poor Dharmendra, he put up with a hell of a lot of hardships to come through *Shalimar*—

and he came through with flying colours.

Speaking of accents, it's strange that Rex did not find fault with Shammi's speech for Shammi insisted on speaking in a queer mixture of British, American and Indian accents. Even Zeenat, for that matter, did not have uniform diction. At times, she would sound quite harsh and shrill; the advantage with Zeenat however, was that she realized her shortcomings and more than that, her carelessness, and was willing to improve.

Coming back to Dharam...during the first week of shooting, apart from a bad back, Dharmendra developed a bad cold as well and he'd be sniffing all the time. This would irritate Rex, who'd order Dharam out of his sight! In retaliation, Dharam would reel off a string of Punjabi cuss words—leaving all the Indians on the sets with very straight faces indeed, for they simply dared not laugh at the great English actor whom they often looked up to as a demi-god, if not God himself!

In all fairness to Dharam and Rex however, it must be said that, in due course, both got over their initial antagonism and became, at least on the surface, amiable friends.

The guy for whom Rex really didn't care at all was O.P. Ralhan. He found O.P. too flamboyant for his taste and, consequently, they were never on good terms. Rex however, enjoyed Shammi Kapoor's company. Shammi was a big-game hunter and Rex had had a great deal of experience of big-game safaris himself. Besides, Rex really became interested in Shammi when he learned that he belonged to the Kapoor clan, which is India's equivalent of the world-famous Barrymore family of artistes.

A major problem in Bangalore were the rains. Krishna and Ronnie had been led to believe that it did not rain in Bangalore at that particular time of year. But, by God, it would rain day after day, and night after night, costing them days of shooting! But the organization was so resourceful that they were always

able to make last-minute changes. Many a time, at short notice, actors would have to memorise a fresh set of lines or change into a fresh set of costumes because of these changes in schedule! It soon became apparent that the pursuit of excellence was motivating members of different nationalities in the unit. *Each one considered himself a representative of his country and strove to do better than the next man. It became a test-match between three countries.* The Indians were eager to display their craft and knowledge; the foreigners believed that they were chosen because of their name and excellence in the profession. A feeling of loyalty and closeness imbued everyone throughout the making of the film and urged the artistes as well as the technicians, to give of their best.

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE SWAMIJI INTO DR DUBARI, AND WHY ARUNA IRANI REPLACED HELEN

"I was surrounded by many friends in the *Shalimar* unit," Krishna confessed. "John Saxon and O.P. Ralhan are both very good and old friends of mine. I didn't have to baby them or give them any extra special attention. I'd often say to them: 'You're my friends. I won't do anything for you. *You* do something for me. *You* help me as friends.'

"There are some interesting aspects about casting yet left uncovered and I'll tell you about them now. Prem Nath's role, for instance.

"Originally, I had a role in the script of an Indian Swamiji and I'd planned to give it to Prem Nath. I'd planned lots of comedy situations between O.P. and Prem Nath. *But when I went to New York, my office there brought it to my notice that there were far too many Indian characters in the film which would make it very different from an international film. Moreover, it's a caper movie, and this sort of comedy, which is so Indian and so provincial, would not be understood by an international audience.*

"I got a similar response from those of my international distributors who had read the script. As such, I decided on a total rewrite.

"At that time I'd gone quite far into Japanese literature. I was

neck-deep in Zen and Akido. So I conceived a samurai-type character. Dimitri Grunwald in London really flipped for the change and he offered to bring in half a million dollars if I made these script changes final.

"Now both O. P. and Prem Nath had not read the entire script. Actually, none of the actors had, except Rex Harrison. So I went ahead and eliminated all the Indian-type comedy which I'd planned for O.P. Ralhan and Prem Nath."

"When I returned to Bombay from abroad I realised that this role of the samurai could never be played by Prem Nath because it requires a lot of control. So we had to tell Prem Nath that he was not in the picture."

"Ronnie, who was then in London, couldn't bring himself to break this news to Prem Nath! We didn't know how he'd take it. He might blow his top! Our Indian distributors might get upset. And after the Gina debacle we were wary about other situations like it. Handling Prem Nath, therefore, could become a major problem. How does one tell an actor that he's out of a picture he's looking forward to doing?"

"I briefly considered Topol for the role of the samurai. I was going to do a picture with him, a ninety-minute T.V. film called Abraham on the life of the Biblical character. The script was mine, Topol was the lead and John Holland, the producer. Then I thought of bringing in the world-famous Japanese actor, Toshiro Mifune for the role, and finally switched to considering Sanjeev Kumar."

"Prem Nath was in London and Ronnie was supposed to break the news to him there. But he didn't. So when Prem Nath returned to Bombay, it was left to me to tell him."

"He talked very excitedly about the movie on meeting me. When I could get a word in edgeways, I told him that I had some good news as well as some bad news for him."

"Tell me the bad news first!" he said.

"Your part in the picture has been written out of the script,"

Bombay TV in an interview with Tabassum. I thought him superb! His control was fantastic. *If I hadn't seen Shammi on TV that day, I would never in my wildest dreams, have even considered him for the role. Because, all I remembered of him was his days as a leading-man, when he was a 'Yahoo' kind of character.*

"This TV interview, I saw him in close-ups all the time and his low-pitched, deliberate sort of voice impressed me. The next night I happened to meet him at a party at Raj Kapoor's residence, and I told him he was fantastic.

"When I came home I thought things over and I had a sudden brainwave. Why not change the Japanese samurai into a Middle Eastern character? Shammi would be best suited for such a role. So I went along to Shammi's house and offered him the role of the Middle Eastern Professor, Dr Dubari, which I had already rewritten in my mind. He was flabbergasted! I admitted that I'd offered the role to Dilip Kumar and what had happened; and now I was offering it to him. I also told him it was a very important role, as important as Prem Nath's would have been if I hadn't written it out of the script. Shammi agreed to do the role.

"And my friend, O.P. Ralhan—right from the start I'd been mesmerised by O.P.'s eyes. The expression in them is one of perpetual rapacity and greed, and *greed* is the most important element of my film. The original role I had written for O.P. was more humorous and clownish, but after the rewrite I played up the greed angle more, and it became a lot less clownish."

The replacement of Helen with Aruna Irani was just another of those things. . . .

Though Helen's name was blazoned in the star-cast of *Shalimar* right from its inception—she had been signed up for that catchy dance-number *Cha-Cha-Cha*—she was suddenly

and mysteriously replaced by Aruna Irani at the last moment.

Why?

When someone asked Mani Mистри why this had happened, the embarrassed answer was—problem of dates. But Helen had been signed up as early as Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman and they'd all been paid their signing amounts after confirmation, in writing, of their dates.

So?

Probing around a bit, I came up with two versions as to what had probably happened. One thing is sure: Helen did create some hassles about dresses, dates and so forth, but this was because she wanted to lay the ground for backing out of her contract. Since that was impossible, the next best thing to do was try and get *them* to chuck her out!

STORY ONE: This said that Helen wanted to be out because a woman named Noor Jehan had by then become quite an important member of the Wardrobe Department. Earlier, when Helen had split a lifelong association with producer P.N. Arora, the scandal-sheets had named this very Noor Jehan as the one responsible for it and they'd even hinted at ultra-intimate relations between Helen and Noor Jehan. Relations between the two had in any case become strained, even before *Shalimar* went into shooting, and some popular fan-magazines had reported Noor Jehan spreading stories derogatory to Helen. Probably because of Noor Jehan's presence in *Shalimar*, Helen wanted out.

STORY TWO: This one says that Salim of the Salim-Javed duo of screen-writers, who was reported by the fan-magazines as having an affair with Helen then, was at loggerheads with rival screen-writer Kadar Khan, Krishna Shah's blue-eyed boy on the Hindi *Shalimar*. Apparently, so this version goes, Salim pressurised Helen to quit *Shalimar* because Kadar Khan was such a big-shot on Krishna Shah's team. Kadar incidentally, has even dubbed the voice and dialogue for Rex Harrison in the

Hindi version of the film.

Which of the two stories is true? Only Helen can say. But the fact remains that she wilfully and deliberately dropped out, and Aruna Irani had to be signed on in her place at the eleventh hour.

BOYFRIENDS, LOVERS, AND ZEENAT'S BREAKTHROUGH

It was amusing to see the list of rooms occupied by the principal stars of *Shalimar* as written up and maintained in the make-shift production office at the Maharajah's Palace in Bangalore. The hand-written list of unit members included Hema Malini's name too!

Interestingly enough, such is the charisma of the Dharam-Hema team that even the Ashoka Hotel people apparently thought Hema was part of the *Shalimar* cast while allotting her a room! Actually, Hema Malini wasn't in Bangalore for *Shalimar*, at all, but for Mehmood's *Janta Hawaldar*, which was shooting at the same time.

For Dharmendra, *Shalimar* was a divine madness, because he was out to prove something. His zeal, of course, helped the performance, but it nearly destroyed the project!

How? Listen to Krishna Shah tell it: "Nobody was as excited as Dharam was. I had had to reshuffle the shooting schedules keeping Dharam's back in mind. Earlier, in a shooting sequence, Dharam had done a fantastic action-shot in which he jumps on his horse and, while galloping away, grabs Zeenat off the ground on to the horse and rides off. It's the kind of shot even professional stunt-men are wary of. So, after that, I put in doubles

whenever required, even for little things. Only close-ups of the action-shots were of Dharam himself and those too, were taken three to four weeks after the injection.

"Dharam is a funny and loveable guy! He did his exercises and followed all the Doctor's instructions with religious care—all except those that forbade him from over-exerting himself!"

It is ironic that news of Dharmendra's physical affliction during those early days in Bangalore was a better-kept secret than news of Hema Malini's visits to the *Shalimar* sets!

Rumours of this travelled to Bombay very swiftly. It is said that Dharmendra's wife flew down to Bangalore and made a dramatic appearance before her husband, telling him she had come because there were wild rumours circulating in Bombay that Dharam was seriously ill and always had four specialists around him.

As a matter of fact, because all the *Shalimar* participants would have to be away from home for three months at a stretch, Suresh Shah and Executive Producer Ronnie Singh had thoughtfully provided for their home-comforts and home-faces, too. Shammi Kapoor, John Saxon, Harvey Genkins, David Wilson, all had their wives with them in Bangalore, and although O.P. Ralhan preferred a steady stream of pretty visitors to any "home-faces," most other unit members had their wives or girlfriends over in Bangalore for certain periods of time. Sexy Remy's Madame Tinker was there right through, and Sylvia Miles, too, had a young and handsome boyfriend, Craig, join her later in Bangalore.

On the sets, the focus of attention was always Zeenat Aman. Even Rex Harrison, the Hollywood super-star, would direct little courtesies her way. Moreover Zeenat, during the making of the film was on top of the world! She was on a *high*, her work was going enormously well, and her rapport with her director was too, too excellent.

Essentially, Zeenat Aman is a director's artiste. She is as good as the director makes her in a film, and in the case of Krishna Shah, Zeenat herself had told me: "It was like an orgasmic experience working with him."

Observers also said that Zeenat tended to be very friendly towards the quiet and well-behaved John Saxon, who was, at all times, the soul of gentlemanliness. In any case, John's wife was with him for the *Shalimar* caper, so it was all on the surface, anyway—the kind of personal-exchange that lightens the tedium of long hours of harrowing and perfectionist work.

The bursting point was reached when Zeenat had that big love scene with Dharam. It was a long and complicated, single shot scene running to a full four minutes, without a cut.

It had taken the lighting crew the whole day to light up that sequence. It was a love-scene and Krishna had written it specially after observing Zeenat for days and finding she has this special kind of *gut* laughter that goes on and on. So he'd built that scene up to a crescendo on that very special kind of spontaneous laugh that Zeenat has. It would obviously be a dead scene unless that laugh came out of Zeenat, loud and long, and very, very natural.

Krishna started filming. But, the laugh wouldn't come. God knows what sort of tensions were building up in Zeenat that day, and Krishna didn't want to pry too deep. After all, he thought, she's grown-up and it's her own private affair.

But that laugh just wouldn't come.

Krishna began to freak out! Time was running short, patience and nerves were wearing thin. Calling a short halt, Krishna asked Zeenat to come outside the sets with him.

He could see there was a lot of tension built up in her and it wasn't being released. She needed to let off steam very badly. She told Krishna about a dream she'd had the night before and they discussed it, analyzed it. He talked to her at length, they had a rap-session and he could feel her loosen up gradually and relax. He could feel the tensions melt away.

They went back to the sets and did the scene immediately and the laughter came out naturally in volcanic cascades and it was something to watch, the way others on the set were held spell-bound by her performance. The moment Krishna called "Cut!" everyone there burst into spontaneous applause.

Zeenat's work that day was tremendous. She had crying close-ups and she did them without glycerine. She had laughing close-ups and she did those effortlessly, too.

Zeena was high on applause that day. When they packed up that evening everyone on the unit kissed her. Krishna Shah said, "It's your major breakthrough as an actress." and that compliment and a special gift from him made her day!

SYLVIA MILES CLASHES WITH MANOHAR MALGONKAR

"The first three to four weeks of shooting were miserable," Krishna observed. "Apart from the problems I've already talked about, we had a variety of East-West problems, the language problem and to top it all, the 'Sylvia Miles problem!'

"Sylvia Miles who was all alone in a strange land amid strange people and strange customs, was missing personal companionship. This was her private crisis and naturally, it made her very uneasy and difficult and people couldn't understand why she was so edgy and temperamental. Besides, she wasn't keeping good health either. She would be very obstinate at times, very fussy about her costumes and things. People were afraid of her. We could not explain all this to everybody and hence she was misunderstood by most people. Quite often I myself would holler at her and then she'd come back to normal because she badly needed to be yelled at—to be given exclusive attention!

"Behroze Mody, Mani Mistri and Sherezade Pandey would take charge of Sylvia. Actually Behroze was the English diction coach and need not have concerned herself with nursing her. But that's the way we functioned on *Shalimar*. Many a time, Behroze and Mani have handled emergencies on their own, and informed me of them only after the whole affair was over, and had a happy ending. By now the Inner Core of *Shalimar* knew what hell I had gone through with Dharam's back crisis and they wanted to spare me as much tension as they possibly could."

The first scrap Sylvia had was on the very first day of shooting, with dialogue-coach Behroze Mody who, ironically, became a kind of godmother on whose shoulders Sylvia used to cry!

Sylvia, in the role of an ageing European Contessa, was required to speak her own Hindi lines. On the first day of shooting a whole lot of people were sitting round her trying to rehearse her lines. The Hindi-dialogue coach was asked to speak them so that she could repeat them after him. But Momin (the coach) spoke too fast and his accent was simply beyond her. The more Momin tried, the more irritated Sylvia was getting and finally she lost her cool and then ... there were 'Fs' and 'Bs' flying all over the place. Momin walked out in a rage. Naturally!

Suddenly, Sylvia turned to Behroze and said, "Mrs. Mody, could you please say those lines? I'm sure I'd be able to repeat them after you." Behroze was obliged to say the few Hindi words she recollected from the lengthy dialogue and Sylvia repeated the sentence, word and tone perfect! Then and there Sylvia made the decision that she would learn her dialogue from Behroze alone.

"Let Momin teach Behroze and I'll learn it from her," Sylvia said. "If the dialogue is put down in phonetics I'll be able to read even Chinese, I'm that good at languages!" Poor Behroze, though she herself was up to her neck in her own work, took up the additional task of teaching Sylvia her dialogue as well.

"Behroze," said Mani Mistri, "naturally presumed that phonetics meant international phonetics. She didn't realize that Sylvia wanted the dialogue written phonetically in Roman. When she handed over a sheet full of symbols, Sylvia exclaimed, 'What's this shit?' which is customary for Sylvia! Behroze didn't like the use of such foul language. There ensued an argument which ended with Sylvia calling Behroze a Puritan."

The quarrel was taken to Krishna who arbitrated and settled it in the best way possible. He at once told Sylvia that if she wanted Behroze to coach her she'd have to do what Behroze

said, if not she could revert to Momin! Sylvia had no choice but to do as Behroze said.

She was damn tough on most of the unit members. Adele Leigh-Wilson, wife of the First Unit Chief Assistant David Wilson, a pretty and shapely New Yorker who'd been in modelling before joining films, was in charge of Wardrobe. She'd done two films only, as a production-assistant before coming to India for *Shalimar*. Sylvia was very fussy about her wardrobe because her own clothes are very expensive and classy.

"Bhanu Athaiya [reputed to be India's leading wardrobe and dress designer for films] and I were scrambling to make it right," said Adele Wilson, "and it made Sylvia nervous. She'd have fits. Her worst fit was in Bombay when I went to meet her with Bhanu and she didn't like anything that we showed her!

"Then one day, in Bangalore, things really came to a head between us when I walked off the sets in a huff and everybody thought I'd walked out of the picture, too."

What really happened was that Sylvia had been irritating Adele all through that particular day. At one o'clock Sylvia was scheduled for a trapeze shot. For this, Adele had arranged for a cape for Sylvia which was going to be ready only at one o'clock. In the meantime, the rest of the crew returned to the hotel and Sylvia had to stay back for another twenty minutes. She started freaking out! She was afraid of staying back in the Studio alone for reasons best known to herself.

She said: "Let's take this shot in any old thing and get it over with!"

This really got Adele very angry because the tailor was trying desperately to finish that cape and bring it in on time. Red with rage, Adele said to her: "Now you get off my arse! We've made enough compromises and I'm not putting you in any old piece of shit! You've got to wait for the wardrobe!"

And she walked off in a huff to see the dress designer about the cape. Everybody thought she'd walked out of the picture

because she was that angry! When Adele returned to the set after some time she saw that everybody was wild with Sylvia or sending her into hysterics, something that rarely happened otherwise!

It's just as well Adele Wilson never walked right out of Shalimar because apart from Zeenat Aman, she was the only sexy young thing on the Shalimar unit. And where would those four hundred men on the team have been without someone to have a little sex on?

One day, I remember, just a week after shooting commenced—the sensation Adele caused by the dress she wore to work.

Already, she had set the pulses of the hotblooded males on the set racing, with her series of daring yet elegant dresses. But that particular day, according to those who lusted after her, it was simply too much!

Or too little—depending on how you look at it!

Because that day Adele wore nothing at all except a sheer, black chiffon crepe gown. She was totally, breathtakingly naked beneath it—and visibly so!

One wonders how anyone concentrated on shooting that day!

Sylvia didn't hit it off with Rex or O.P. Ralhan either. For a man of strong likes and dislikes made no bones about disliking Sylvia. She just did not appeal to his colonial, typical British taste. As for O.P. because he and Sylvia were two of a kind, there was no love lost between them at all!

O.P. had a problem remembering his lines. This of course happens to many actors. He wasn't able to do both versions at once. If he remembered his Hindi lines he'd forget the English ones and vice-versa. So he'd first do either English or Hindi and then rehearse all over again before doing the other version. He'd rehearse loudly on the sets with Monica Vee, too.

dialogue-coach (Hindi version).

This made Sylvia nervous, because she too had Hindi dialogue in the film and she was speaking her lines herself. She had to be given a cue-card sometimes (a huge blackboard on which the dialogue is written out boldly and placed just outside the camera's field, so that the artiste can keep track of the dialogue while performing. Even Marlon Brando occasionally used cue-cards while acting) to help her out with her lines. O.P.'s loud rehearsing would drive Sylvia out of her mind—a natural thing to happen when one is in strange surroundings with a babel of foreign languages all spoken out loud at the same time! She wouldn't know what people around her were talking about and it made her paranoid! *She had many scenes with O.P. and sometimes in the middle of a shot, she'd lose her temper at him!*

O.P. tried to make it up to her by taking her to town one day and buying her lovely gifts, but despite this their relationship was strained. This, however, never interfered with O.P.'s work. He never did anything to jeopardise either his work or Krishna's relationships with his stars. If anything, he only wanted to help Krishna.

The same goes for Sylvia too. Though she was rough on everybody and was herself going through a personal crisis, it did not affect her performance. She amazed everybody with her acting. Actually she wasn't being difficult just to show off or to satisfy her ego. She had her loyalties to the picture and she wanted to come up with an excellent performance.

"Everybody had a companion or a friend but Sylvia didn't have anybody," said Ronnie Singh explaining Sylvia's behaviour. "The only two friends she had, Krishna and I, were too busy with our own headaches. Of course, we did put the PR girls in charge of her but she wouldn't tolerate them because she wanted male company. So finally we decided on the only plausible solution. We'd send for her boyfriend, Craig Brown, and he could live with her for the time she'd be in India."

From the day Sylvia learnt about Craig's arrival till the day he actually arrived she drove everybody crazy. The only thing she could say was: "Craig's coming! Craig's coming!"

And when Craig Brown finally came, he turned out to be at least twenty years younger than Sylvia! Very sweet, very well-behaved, very thoughtful, and the only person who could control Sylvia's tantrums.

The best example of this is the beautiful way in which Craig handled the unpleasantness between novelist Manohar Malgonkar and Sylvia when she threw one of her most awful tantrums in public in the dining hall of the Ashoka Hotel.

Sylvia had invited Manohar Malgonkar and Behroze Mody to dinner with Craig and herself. She had met Manohar and found him "a sweet old man, who's a bit of an intellectual"! What Sylvia did not foresee was that Manohar was far superior to her intellectually—a great blow to her ego because she prides herself on being a very intellectual human being, indeed.

The incident, as narrated by one of the guests present at the bar and dining hall that night, goes like this:

That evening Sylvia was at the bar pretty early. By the time her guests arrived she'd downed six whiskies and was on her seventh. Seeing her tipsy, Behroze and Manohar both declined a drink and suggested they go in and eat right away. *This annoyed Sylvia immensely.* Anyway, she went in with the rest and Craig and she sat facing Manohar and Behroze.

They started talking and Craig was doing most of the answering. Suddenly Manohar started asking questions like: "Why did you become an actress?" "What's the difference between acting in an American film and acting in an Indian film?" and so on. And Sylvia didn't want to answer questions!

But Manohar, being a writer and having a deadline for his book, was being very insistent. He asked her questions about the role she was playing in *Shalimar* and how she felt about it. This annoyed Sylvia all the more because she realised that he

was far cleverer than she—and *that* she couldn't take!

Suddenly Sylvia lost her cool and started insulting Manohar. She said, "You are being very personal." Then in her wonderful, four-letter, fancy American language she said: "Is it that you want to screw me? It's all right Craig being here. But why don't you be open about it? You damn writers are always hiding behind big words!"

Manohar replied: "Look, Miss Miles, I'm not at all interested in you sexually!"

And boy, did she blow her top! How could any man dare say he wasn't interested in her, sexually? She yelled, "This bastard has insulted me!" And jumping up she grabbed her fork and knife and thumped them down on the table!

Everybody froze! The musicians stopped playing. In pin-drop silence everybody watched the four of them at that table. Craig caught hold of Sylvia and said through clenched teeth: "Sylvia, sit down!" And she did.

With a sigh of relief they resumed their conversation and everything came back to normal. After some time Manohar once again got back to his questions! He told Sylvia: "Look Ma'am, I've Krishna Shah's permission to interview you and I'm not doing so for my pleasure. I've got very little time. I'm an old man. I like a good night's sleep and I'm leaving tomorrow. Please be good enough to answer these questions systematically and in brief."

Sylvia got up abruptly and walked away. As she was going she yelled, "Craig, come on!"

Craig replied: "Sylvia, get out!"

"Craig, you-so-and-so-and-so," Sylvia yelled. "You belong to me, you don't belong to them!" And she walked out of the hall.

The whole dining hall was staring at the trio seated at the table. Suddenly Sylvia came back because she had left her handbag and her keys behind. She picked up her things and

turning to Manohar yelled, "You... you... you..." when ~~Craig~~ interrupted her saying: "Sylvia, shut up and get out of here!" *She went quietly, like a mouse.*

And they sat there, the three of them for another half-hour, with Craig apologizing profusely on behalf of Sylvia and then drifting into small talk.

The next day the whole hotel was talking about it and all kinds of wild stories were being circulated among the unit members. But the truth about the whole incident was never told to anybody, not even to Krishna Shah, who came to hear of it only days later!

That was one side of Sylvia Miles. But there were times when she could be equally affectionate. She had a heart of gold but her vicious tongue spoilt everything.

For example, when she was leaving, Sylvia had the decency to wish everybody goodbye, which none of the other stars did. And she was also the only one among the stars—besides O.P.—who gave gifts to everybody. And her gifts were real, meaningful gifts! She believed in paying from her own pocket for whatever luxuries she indulged in.

All the foreigners loved a hot-oil massage and there was a special doctor who'd come and give them their massages every week, at O.P. Raihan's cost. Sylvia was the only one who had a massage every day, and she insisted on paying her own bill.

The day Sylvia left, she caught hold of the chauffeur who had been allotted to her for the duration of her stay, in the lobby of the hotel and kissed him ~~smilingly~~ on both cheeks, thanking him with tears in her eyes. The witnesses to this fond farewell were thoroughly astonished and the poor driver stood beyond words! And Sylvia didn't just confine her feelings to this exhibitionism. She dug into her purse and tipped the man— one thousand rupees!

"That," said someone close to the unit, "was much more than what anyone gave to any of the drivers."

Those were the two sides of Sylvia Miles, a strange bundle of contradictions!

A NUDE SCENE

The filming of *Shalimar* was divided into two units right from the start. The First Unit, directly under Krishna Shah, involved the filming of the main story-line with the principal artistes. The Second Unit, directly under Ernie Day, involved the filming of the action-scenes, the explosions, the stunt-men, with the principal artistes only coming in for close-ups in the action shots.

The camera of the Second Unit was handled by Ronnie Anscombe and K. Ramanlal, while the First Unit cameramen were Harvey Genkins and D. K. Prabhakar with Maurice Arnold as the focus-puller.

For the record, the Assistant Directors of the First Unit were: David Wilson, Uday Shankarpani, Sudhir Wahi and Gopal Bali. The Assistants in the Second Unit were: Deepak Balraj, Ahmed Khan aided by Shetty (one of India's top stunt-men) and Jackie Cooper—the Hollywood stunt-man.

Along with these two units, there was a Third Unit—the Video Team, handled by Kumar Vasudeo who was joined by Ian Kelly—the video specialist from London.

All three units were constantly—and simultaneously—filming. And director Krishna Shah was shuttling all the time between all three sets of teams, supervising, correcting, reorganising, and keeping the strictest possible overall directorial check on their progress. It's a wonder how he did so much work every day, and yet remained fresh as a daisy in the evening! But

it was just this kind of control that made it possible for Krishna Shah to bring *Shalimar* in on schedule.

An important scene in the film is the seduction of Romeo (O.P. Ralhan) by the Countess (Sylvia Miles). In it, Sylvia enters Romeo's bedroom, where he is sitting on the floor, mapping out his scheme to steal the ruby.

The action shows Sylvia pausing and saying a few tantalizing words to a gaping Ralhan. Then she draws off her gloves, tosses the rose from her décolletage into Ralhan's lap, opens the buttons down the front of her gown, bends over to help Ralhan to his feet, and they proceed to bed.

Most of the crew were not allowed on set because this was a nude scene. In the first two rehearsals, Sylvia unbuttoned her dress fully and bared her breasts. Quite nonchalantly she would turn this way and that, and then shove her breasts back into her dress again.

Krishna Shah seemed over-worried about the Censors in the Hindi language version. He kept asking over and over again: "Will the Censors pass this? Is it okay for the Indian Censors?" and so on. Ralhan reassured him that several Indian actresses showed a lot of cleavage in lots of Hindi movies, and Krishna stopped worrying.

Later, the camera cuts to the bed with the action over (for the screen) and depicts a snoring Ralhan and a Sylvia humming to herself as she slips out of the room.

Ralhan decided to lie back in the nude for the scene, displaying a pot-belly (which Krishna Shah seriously described as "a very sexy Oriental belly"!) and a lot of leg through a carelessly draped bedsheet. Again Krishna became a trifle worried about the Censors and turned round to ask Mani Mistri about it. She told him it was okay so long as it was a man who was doing the displaying, not a woman. Reassured

again, Krishna proceeded. . . .

Ralhan's constant jabbering—the ~~man talks gibberish~~ in a dozen and in top pitch!—was really getting on Sylvia's nerves. While she was trying to concentrate on her shot and discussing something with Krishna, Ralhan would go into his monotonous chatter routine, his snoring practice, and so forth. You should have seen Sylvia's face! She almost blew her top from frustration!

Meanwhile, Ralhan just couldn't remember his dialogue—and this went on right through the production. Some said that it was the English that was making Ralhan self-conscious, but even his Hindi dialogue was never properly memorised.

Finally Krishna exploded, saying, "I want to go on record, you know, that tomorrow if anyone doesn't know his lines, you know, I'll just stop the shooting, you know!"

And he paced furiously up and down the room!

That "You know" is the surest sign that Krishna Shah is very angry indeed !

Krishna told me: "The first breakthrough in acting came one day during the second week of shooting. *I would always talk to Dharam and Zeenat about underacting. My constant reminder to them on the sets was to pipe down, to cut the degree of performing to half the size they were accustomed to in Hindi movies. They thought the Indian public would not accept underplayed acting.*

"Saigal and Dilip Kumar both, the two kings of the Indian screen, always underplayed. But the Indian artistes found it difficult to appreciate this point.

"And then, one day in the second week of shooting, it happened. . .

"We were doing this scene where Rex, after imprisoning Dharam, tells him the secret of why he has been killing off all

his rivals.

"It's a very intimate moment. Rex had worked himself up for that shot and everyone over there knew that he was in a tense mood. I had decided to shoot a master. Since all the artistes would be present in that scene, including Dharam and Zeenat, the lighting and setting arrangements for the scene took something like six hours—from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M.

"Then, at the last moment, something about Rex's expression made me alter my plan abruptly—I would not take the master-shot. Instead, I'd go only for Rex's close-up. Everyone was astonished; the unit members did not know what I was up to.

"And how Rex underplayed that scene!

"The power of his voice, his eyes, the twitch of his facial muscles, everything was perfect! When you underplay, even the blink of an eye carries loads of significance. And Rex's whole being exuded power at that moment!

"When Rex finished that close shot all the crew members, two-thirds of whom didn't know English, burst into applause!

"I think this was the first breakthrough for Rex as well as the Indian actors. I remember when this scene was being shot, I just walked up to where Zeenat was standing, and she quietly gave me her hand and we stood there holding hands tightly. We were both simply enthralled by Rex's acting. Right then I knew it was going to be one of the high points of my movie. And it is."

After this episode, according to Krishna Shah, both Dharmendra and Zeenat Aman would watch Rex Harrison like hawks, studying him minutely, trying to learn what they could from him.

Krishna said: "Rex Harrison had become a star over the years and he'd lost his own nonsense about acting. People were beginning to feel afraid of him because success had made him difficult. Rex had reached a stage where one does not direct him. He knows everything there is to know about acting. He's been a big star since the age of twenty-two and that's nearly

half-century in the past.

"Rex is also the basic rapport gap between us. to me in my dealings

David Wilson was the first to praise the performance. He said, "Krishna's performance is all that counts for him. He gives a lot of attention to the performances. And as a result, he gives a flawless performance. He felt that the best way to get to the bottom for every scene, as on the stage."

"Rex also helped me a great deal in polishing the script," Krishna Shah confessed. "He'd take a sentence here, alter a word here, substitute a word there, make it neat and concise. Most actors want more lines to speak; not so Rex. He knows the power of cinema, of his face and his eyes. He'd often tell me: 'Cut down my lines. Take them away. Give me just an expression. Something to play with.'"

"Everyone in the unit knew that if Rex was given the choice between a line or no line, he would choose no line.

"And Dharmendra...

"Many a time I'd help Dharam with his English lines. If there were difficult words to pronounce I'd ask him first how he'd pronounce them and then I'd take his own phrase and put it into the script. Dharam's accent in the English version comes across very beautifully. With Zeenat of course, I had no problem. Her English is impeccable."

The dialogue for Sir John has a distinctly Victorian flavour, and Rex was amused to find that Indian Krishna Shah could so faithfully recreate Victorian English in the script.

Actually, Rex was continually amused by English usage down south. He'd read the Bangalore edition of the *Deccan Herald* every morning, pick up sentences here and there, and show them laughingly to Krishna. It became a sort of standing joke

with him, the way English is used in India and the infinitely weird grammatical structure and pronunciation we give to a language the White rulers left behind after Britannia ceased to rule the waves.

"I told you about that scene when the entire unit on set broke into applause," Krishna said. "After that, Rex was on Cloud Nine. He was in ecstasy. He felt, suddenly, that his acting was going to be good, to be appreciated. After all, hadn't people who didn't understand a word of what he was saying, applauded him? If he could reach them on an emotional level, he had every right to feel ecstatic.

"I think Rex Harrison's whole feeling about India changed from that day onwards. He didn't feel like an outsider any more. He was a healthy and robust sixty-nine year-old young man!"

WHAT CO-PRODUCTION REALLY MEANS

It is relevant at this stage to pause and try and examine what a co-production really means.

Why have so many efforts at putting through a co-production failed? Why are distributors in the West averse to using Indian stars? Why are film-promoters there totally antagonistic to the very idea of co-production?

First of all there is the ninety-day problem.

Any foreigner coming to India on work, is issued a working visa, not a tourist one. Thus, even if he is not paid a salary or contractual remuneration in India, if he overstays ninety days at a stretch, he is assessed for income tax in India on his world income!

In the case of the American and British technicians who flew into India for *Shalimar*, though only their expenses were being paid by Laxmi Productions, Bombay, the ruling still applied.

Add to this another ruling: that the said foreigner cannot stay more than a total of one hundred and eighty days in any one financial year. This meant that if the picture wasn't finished in less than ninety days, they'd have to fly the technicians out, and in again. And doing that for fifteen people would add a sizeable chunk of overbudgeting to an already overburdened budget.

Thus, the only way to make *Shalimar* was to plan and shoot this film in twelve weeks, both versions. It was a bigger risk and a bigger challenge than the *Long Duel* which was scheduled for

eighty-four days, one version.

So they brought into play all their ideas and prepared the most detailed script-breakdowns, cross-plots and so forth, so that if there happened to be rain and they couldn't shoot one schedule, they'd promptly switch to another and not waste time.

Now this sort of precise planning meant everything had to be ready in advance—costumes, sets, decor, props, jewellery, the works. Also all the songs (for the Indian version) simply had to be recorded ahead of the shooting. *And for that you needed to lock up fifteen to twenty lakhs of rupees even before shooting a single frame of your movie!*

No money from the overseas investor comes into India. Collaboration means, the moment you step into India, the Indian investor pays. Just as, after the shooting, when you go abroad for the editing and dubbing (either or both versions) the moment you step out of India, the foreign investor starts paying.

That is collaboration. The Indian investor doesn't bother with the foreign exchange investment.

Why then, you may ask, if there are so many headaches inherent in co-production, do so many people want to go in for it? The answer is simple:

The attraction of making a film in India is that the cost of production is very low here compared to what it would be in the U. K., the U. S. A., or Europe. It would probably be half the cost of making the same film in Hollywood.

Furthermore, what a lot of fantastic and utterly beautiful locations there are in India, in addition to the wealth of talent available in the entertainment industry here.

Shalimar gave the Indian technicians the opportunity to work in that system, to exploit their capacities to the fullest. Eighty-five per cent of the technical personnel on *Shalimar* were Indians. Of the stars—three were foreign and four Indian. The director

and executive producer were both Indian, though from America and England.

The key man who made Shalimar possible, in the first place, was Suresh Shah. If he had not furnished the Completion Guarantee, there would have been no insurance and no collateral financing from the West.

Ronnie Singh emphasises this time and again. He says, "Only two major factors need to be resolved.

"One: You need the Government of India's blessings so that bureaucratic headaches can be cut down to a minimum. In most other nations they have a film commission which clears co-production proposals in a matter of weeks. In India it takes anywhere up to six months, because nobody really knows what to do in the bureaucracy!

Two: The financial aspect. The Indian collaborator in a co-production must have all the money ready in advance. He should be able to put up the Completion Guarantee. Without this, no big co-production with top international stars is possible.

"In this Suresh Shah has opened doors for India; and others are bound to follow in his footsteps."

So much for the basic necessities in a co-production venture. Coming down to duties, Ronnie Singh says: "Krishna and I had made clear-cut demarcations. We never interfered in one another's areas of command. Neither did Suresh Shah interfere with our departments. He just backed us to the hilt in everything.

"We used to make weekly reports on the budget—sometimes the actual expenses ran higher than budgeted; other times they were lower. Suresh made it possible for us to overshoot our budget by ten to fifteen per cent. He would never grumble!"

The unit had organized editing facilities on location, a practice not common for Indian film units shooting on location. They would fly the exposed film from Bangalore to Bombay every night, and Film Centre Laboratory would fly the rushes back to them

by midday, to view on location. The unit had brought out a special anamorphic, panavision lens which was fitted on the projector in order to see the sound-rushes. Both editors—the one on the Hindi version; as well as the one on the international version—were working with their staff as shooting progressed.

“The only way to make a film,” Ronnie Singh continued, “is to have a blueprint. Yards and yards of blueprints, actually. It’s only then that the several heads of department, the production executives and controllers and everyone else can see how to coordinate the work.

“We had a Daily Progress Report. We had a Continuity Report, a producer’s breakdown for every day. Every night by 8 P.M. I’d have all these reports before me and know how much film was exposed by the First Unit, by the Second Unit and so forth; how many people had breakfast, how many lunches had been issued—everything.

“The Catering Manager would give me an account of all drinks and snacks issued during the day. The Production Manager would report how many sound-tapes were used. The Accountant would give me a week’s report for hotel expenses, etc. We had a Financial Progress Report, a Technical Progress Report and an overall Continuity and Artistic Report.

“We had Polaroid cameras with hundreds of rolls of film so we didn’t have to write continuity; we just had to keep on taking pictures of every set-up. We had the most sophisticated sound equipment so there’d be no need for post-dubbing at all. Sound was taped directly and we could play back the tapes and listen immediately. Within three days we were seeing the rushes with sound.”

Coming down to the actual working experiences, Ronnie Singh had many interesting matters to report.

“The case of *Shalimar* was unique in that, for the first time, the foreign technicians and stars were not the bosses. They

just came in as hired people to work under an Indian director and an Indian producer, and then went away. For them it was probably not easy to accept this situation and so it wasn't possible for them to shed their inhibitions about India and Indians, for the first week or so. Then they realised that our standards were as high as theirs.

"Take Rex Harrison for instance!" Ronnie Singh grinned. "Rex wanted to have his clothes made in England and his wigs in America. I did offer to have his clothes made in England, if there was time. But there wasn't. And I knew that this would cost about four to five hundred pounds per suit, plus the cost of trial fittings and all. It'd simply kill us! So I requested Rex to bring his own wardrobe and we'd buy it off him and he agreed. Then when certain other costumes were made in Bombay for him, he was so pleased with them that he wanted us to present them to him, and we did!

"The same with Sylvia. She too doubted that we could make the lovely gowns and dresses we needed for her in India. But we did, and she too was reconciled.

"Rex was quite a sport, actually!" Ronnie laughed. "We had a contract with him to give him a limousine with a chauffeur. When he was in Bombay we did give him a Mercedes with a liveried chauffeur. But when he arrived in England I said, 'Rex, if I give you an Impala or a Mercedes you'll have to give the same to everybody else—or there'll be a war! So be a sport and use an Ambassador.' He just agreed and without any fuss. As a matter of fact, he went around in Indian cars only.

"We brought a make-up supervisor from London," Ronnie continued. "It was purely a diplomatic move. We had about eight stars, and one man for each star. We had four Indian assistants to the make-up supervisor in order to win the confidence of the stars. We also had a white man as the make-up supervisor.

"But, in time, they all learned that we're damn good in quite a few things, ourselves. Like, we had to order a wig for Rex just the way he wanted it from his wig-makers in New York, but he eventually rejected it and we had a wig-made right here, that pleased Rex no end. *And who made it? A local wig-maker who knew no English, who didn't dress elegantly in a safari-suit or even formal wear, but a grimy kurta-pyjama! But he made a damn good wig—and that's all that really mattered.*

"This business of not accepting anything Indian, until they saw for themselves how good made-in-India really is, worked for all the foreigners the way it worked for Rex. *Even when it came to people, the foreigners quickly accepted their Indian counterparts as equals when they saw how good they are at their jobs.*

"There was one guy who was a real miracle.

"He was one of the spot-boys in the Second Unit. He did not speak English at all; he didn't even speak Hindi well. He knew only Kannada. But he was excellent at his job and he'd had experience while working in Kannada films.

"Ernie Day, the Second Unit director would say to him in English—American English—"I want black coffee without sugar," and the guy would understand instinctively!

"None of the foreign technicians understood the language but they understood the mood and the feelings."

There are other hassles as well, that have to be tackled in a co-production. For instance, dubbing and billing. Do you know how touchy big stars are about dubbing their own voices? In Follywood it's sacrilege if you even suggest that someone else dub a big (or small) star's voice!

Not many people know it, but the biggest Hollywood stars are dubbed by other people's voices, in different languages for mass exhibition in different countries.

So in *Shalimar* Rex speaks for himself in English, but Kadar Khan speaks for him in Hindi—and that's the way it is.

Then there's billing.

In the international version of *Shalimar* the overseas stars are billed first, but in the Hindi-language film, the billing is reversed.

Get me? It's all a question of marketing, of giving audiences in different nations what they want. It's a pretty dicey business, all in all.

THE FINAL WEEKS

Shooting for *Shalimar* was one breakneck, long-drawn, hectic schedule! Often, the Production Department would be put to all kinds of difficulties because of last-minute changes in plans and additions. Take for instance, the time Krishna decided late one evening that he'd like to have a deer, a peacock and some fish in the pond for his next morning's shooting, to be done in the garden.

Krishna was doing the rounds of the following day's sets with the Art Director, Ram Yedekar, as usual. Suddenly he had this brainwave. Though Ram had made the set as realistic as possible, Krishna felt that it would look better if they had some wild animals on it, too.

The director's wish is law in every movie. They had to get the animals by the next morning—but where from? The zoo would open only late next morning and even then, by the time all the formalities were over, the shot would be delayed.

That night saw the Production people in four cars, rushing all over town, trying desperately to find some wild animals, somehow or the other! They had to ask around to find out if anybody possessed a deer or a peacock and quite often they'd be led on a wild goose chase.

Finally, just as day was breaking, they managed to find a deer which they had to buy off the owner for three hundred rupees, and then they practically stole a peacock from someone who was quite reluctant to part with it!

Anyway, just as arrangements for the shot were going on in the morning, a dusty little car drove up and delivered the star of the peacock. Krishna Shah's joy knew no bounds. He did not know that while he had been fast asleep, about a dozen cars were rushing around town in search of livestock.

Then there was the time they had to do a scene for the film where the whole Palace garden, the garden in front of everything was involved and there were to be several explosions at distances of about one hundred yards each. The big tower was to be blown off. They prepared a mixture of diesel and kerosene and put it into plastic bags at a distance of a hundred yards each, with wires running out from them. All this was set up during the day in the morning shooting.

That night they got ready for the shot. The cameras were stationed, the cameras readied and the camera man, the Brumberger, who was in charge, told the assistant camera men the explosions. They pressed the first switch, then the second switch. Again nothing happened. Then the third, the fourth and finally the fifth switch was pressed and it happened!

There was panic! The shot was a failure. The scene was the climax and had to be done again.

On looking around carefully, the camera man discovered that the terminals had got soaked with rain.

It took nearly four hours to dry the terminals. Once again, when the shot was taken, the camera man discovered that the petrol had got soaked with rain. He sprinkled on the ground with a hose. The rain evaporated, the diesel evaporated, the petrol evaporated.

By the time everything was dry, it was nearly half an hour. The shot was taken and the scene was finished. The petrol was led on the ground and the scene was finished.

sequence was shot.

It was a round-the-clock struggle during those nerve-racking weeks of shooting to keep *Shalimar* on schedule, and the last two weeks were the worst.

After six weeks the Second Unit had not yet finished its work because of intermittent rain, and the members of that unit had to stay on a couple of weeks longer, which cost them a hell of a lot more money.

With the artistes (the First Unit) things were better. Luckily Krishna Shah finished John Saxon's shooting exactly an hour before his plane from Bangalore was scheduled to take off for Bombay. And he finished Sylvia Miles' work a full day ahead of schedule. Thus no overtime payments fell due to either artiste.

The two final weeks after John Saxon and Sylvia Miles left were, however, plain hell.

All sorts of calamities occurred.

Stunt-man Shetty almost got killed in the middle of a shot. He has a heart-condition, and in the middle of a fight, his heart started acting up. Then Usman, one of the stunt-men, while doing a high jump scene, fell and got hurt. Rex Harrison fell ill with the flu and was out of action for a couple of days.

Then, one day, the cameras broke down!

In the middle of a shot, they just stopped, and they wouldn't function again! So they had to fly out new cameras from London. This took another few days.

Then Shaifa who plays Rex Harrison's bodyguard (and a cameraman by profession) almost got killed in a blast! It happened like this: towards the end of their three month long shooting schedule, heaven knows what prompted Shaifa to volunteer to do a bit of stunt-riding when he wasn't proficient in it, for he practically killed himself in the bargain. There was an explosion while he was riding and Shaifa was badly injured. But despite being in acute pain and having third-degree burns, he

turned up again for shooting the next day!

Finally, there was the time, close to the end of shooting, when Harvey Genkins was suddenly hospitalised because he suffered a stroke. Can you imagine, Krishna's right-hand man, one of the most important technicians in the unit coming down with a stroke just two weeks before winding up at Bangalore?

It caused a crisis almost as serious as Dharam's back. Fortunately for *Shalimar*, the unit put the picture before themselves. Though most of the unit members were by then almost confined to bed with fatigue, overstrain, and probably heading for a breakdown because of the killing schedule, they carried on work without Harvey, as best they could. What's more, one unit member would always be sitting outside Harvey's room in the nursing home night and day. Krishna would sometimes sneak away to the hospital while lighting arrangements were going on, to visit him. The person most worried about the whole affair was Harvey himself. He just couldn't take the idea of being dispensable in the middle of the film, and his work be carried on by others of the unit.

Things got so bad that the drivers attached to the Shalimar Transport Department came to the conclusion that someone had cast an evil eye on the project. And they sacrificed a goat to ward off the evil influence! But this did not help at all.

So they decided to have a *puja* on Diwali in the living-room of the Palace which is also the biggest set in the film. Everybody was invited and the foreigners turned up in kurtas and saris and sat cross-legged on the floor with the Indians, solemnly participating in the ceremony. Overcome by the weird chanting of the priest, the flower-bedecked deities, the incense and the sprinkling of holy water over them, they began to comprehend something of the mystique of India. At the end of the ceremony *prasad* was distributed to all; the foreigners were so taken up by the whole affair that they ate it up reverently, forgetting, for a moment, all about the Indian diseases they

were so afraid of!

By that time the open-hearted hospitality of the Indians, their peculiar tastes and smells had got under their skin, so forgetting their professionalism, they became Indians; and after the ceremony when Suresh Shah distributed boxes of sweets, they went around embracing other members of the unit in the true Diwali spirit. And believe it or not, somehow, inexplicably the jinx on *Shalimar* disappeared after that *puja* for ever.

"While all this was happening," said Krishna Shah, "I was keeping a watchful eye on Dharam. I would not trust him out of my sight, because one never knows when he gets into the mood to prove his masculinity!"

As though things weren't bad enough already, a series of power failures in Bangalore added to their headaches. In spite of all this, they managed to finish in the allotted time, because Krishna Shah had made it a point to keep ahead of schedule. The only thing they did not finish was the spectacular dance item which was to be shot at Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, and was delayed because of the cyclones.

One of the little personal touches Krishna Shah initiated and maintained throughout the period everyone was together in Bangalore, was the giving of gifts. Every little occasion called for a gift. On the very first day of the shooting, gifts were distributed to each and everyone. Someone did a good shot—he or she was given a gift. They were exchanging gifts all the time! "Even when the artistes were leaving," Krishna Shah said, "we all got together and gave them gifts. We must have spent something like thirty thousand rupees on gifts!"

It was this custom which helped them to form very strong attachments for one another and for the unit as a whole.

"When Rex was leaving," Krishna Shah revealed, "I didn't give a press-party or anything like that because I wanted to avoid all the unpleasantness that could well arise from such a get-together.

"The press would ask him questions like how many times he's been married, how many divorces he's had, who Madame Tinker is—and Rex hates such personal questions! Moreover, there were lots of press people simply waiting to cross-question him about the Customs episode. How could we deliberately make ourselves a party to such an eventuality? So I decided that the best thing would be to host a quiet farewell for him."

The only exposure to the media permitted to Rex Harrison by Krishna Shah was a television interview in Bombay on his way back to London. But even that was quite a fizzle-out because it was telecast on Christmas Eve, a time when scarcely anyone watches TV.

"The goodbyes were the worst," Krishna Shah said. "Everybody dreaded the day when *Shalimar* would be over. Even the spot-boys hated to break away from us. *Tom Brumberger didn't want to leave at all, and we literally had to push him on the plane. He got drunk, because he just couldn't leave us in a sober state! He cried like a child.*

"The heads of the different departments had become like father-figures and our Indian crew assisting them were so touched that they became sentimental when it came to saying goodbye.

"We had thirteen foreign technicians in all. Two of Tom Brumberger's assistants, Indian boys, were very poor, earning only about a hundred and fifty rupees a month, yet they came all the way with him to Bombay at their own expense just to see him off on the international flight! It's simply amazing how this huge crew of four hundred strong lived as one family. There were quarrels, fights and bitching, yet they all stuck together and hated to part!"

When they did part, the foreigners left India with a feeling of warmth, having become one with this once-in-a-lifetime Indian experience. For the first time they were able to rise above their rational and practical selves and let emotion take over.

Take the case of Harvey Genkins and his polite, English-speaking driver. They had a father-son relationship and Harvey and his wife Doris had even been to the poor lad's house to meet his mother and sister. Harvey was so touched by the boy's poverty that he decided to adopt him and take him back to America. But do you think the lad agreed to that? No Siree! He preferred to stay back home and look after his old mother! It was a decision that left the foreigners stunned, and at the same time, moved, when they heard it. And perhaps the driver really did regret his decision later when he had to bid good-bye to Harvey and his wife at the airport! At the moment of parting, Harvey Genkins broke down and wept like a baby.

After the majority of the foreigners had gone, Krishna Shah was left with the songs to picturise (for the Hindi language version). Only a portion of one song had yet been done. All the rest were kept pending for filming after the unit returned to Bombay.

"Shooting in Bombay was a different kettle of fish altogether," Krishna Shah observed. "We had a big problem keeping other producers away! Dharam and Zeenat had been away from Bombay for so long that their other producers for whom they were working, used to queue up outside their make-up rooms in Mehboob Studios!

"Dharam and Zeenat both stuck to their guns however, and refused to part with any dates to any other producer until they completed their job on *Shalimar*.

"Once I even heard Dharam say to one of his producers: 'I'm so much into *Shalimar*, I simply won't be able to concentrate on your film'."

The songs picturised on Dharam and Zeenat are used only in the Hindi version of the film. In the English version Krishna Shah has kept only the tribal dance and perhaps a portion of

chews paan and spits all over the place. things like that!"

Originally, for the tribal dance, Krishna Shah had planned to use three hundred dancers, to make it the biggest dance item ever choreographed for any Hindi film. "I wanted to make it a spectacle by itself!" Krishna commented.

"Eventually, as the dance was patterned and set, we found we wouldn't really need more than two hundred dancers. In any event, by the time we got to Mahabalipuram we were hopelessly over-budgeted on *Shalimar*. I had to cut down on expenses wherever possible. And Hiralal, remember, had been coaching those two hundred dancers for about six months!

"Hiralal's regimen for their training and shooting was a hard one. They had all to wake up at 4 a.m. and be at the studios by 6 a.m. I always thought I was a disciplinarian, but Hiralal seemed to me like the man who invented discipline!

"One day, one of the dancers came ten minutes late. He sent her packing immediately! Among the dancers Hiralal is worshipped like a god! They bow before him every morning, they touch his feet before they start work, and do the same while leaving.

"At the end of the day, the dancers would go to their hotel and after that they were not allowed to step out, especially the girls. They were not allowed to drink or even play games. The girls lived in huge halls, about thirty in each. They were very disciplined. Their sense of honour was impeccable. The girls were not allowed to mix with the boys. They all had to go to bed by 9 p.m. and be up again at four.

"Hiralal's knowledge of cameras, angles, compositions, all leave you spellbound! I'd discuss each and every camera set-up with Hiralal. There were some four hundred different shots cut into that six-and-a-half minute sequence, and that man had the overall continuity of the entire dance clear-cut in his head!"

AND ON TO THE RELEASE DAY...

Work on a movie never really finishes until the Release Day, and frequently goes on even after that.

After the shooting of *Shalimar* was over, director Krishna Shah virtually lived in the editing rooms until he assembled the first rough-cut of the movie.

It was a big day—rather a big night—when the Inner Core (Krishna Shah, Ronnie Singh, Mani Mistri, Kenny Kochar) previewed that first rough-cut. It was held around midnight, at the B.R. Sound 'n' Music Theatre in Juhu. Kenny Kochar had posted two production toughs inside the projectionist's booth to ensure that no nosey-parkers watched the movie secretly from up there!

Krishna Shah rang me up excitedly the following morning: "We saw the picture last night," he said. "By God, it's terrific! Listen—no music! No sound! Just the picture! And Dharam walks away with it! Rex is terrific and we all expected him to steal the show. But no—Dharam holds it! And I'm so pleased with it. I'm so happy about having taken Dharam and Zeenat in the dead.

"It's such a fascinating challenge for me to present them in the international market. It wouldn't have been quite the same if I'd taken Clint Eastwood or Dyan Cannon. I wouldn't have got that much attention then. It'd be just another American movie.

"I was, after the shooting and before last night, literally a

nervous wreck! Until I saw the rough-cut, I wouldn't let anybody see it before me. Not even Suresh Shah or Bhupendra.

"I had thought Dharam would be just passable—no more—in the English-language version. I'm overwhelmed by him. He sweeps the picture along with him in so many scenes! In the humorous sequences, especially, Dharam doesn't have to make any effort, he can be funny without even trying. He's a natural!

"Ronnie was the happiest last night after seeing the rough-cut. He wanted to celebrate until five this morning! You know, the last one hour of the movie really comes across with a zing! It literally keeps you on the edge of your seat!"

That was months ago.

After that, Krishna showed the picture to the Censors and took all his reels to London where for months he worked on the "final." He'd keep shuttling between London and Bombay, because he had to record his background music score with R.D. Burman, do a good bit of dubbing in Bombay, and so forth.

In London, too, *Shalimar* was kept a top secret in the labs. But Krishna showed the English version to three close friends of his: Dimitri Grunwald, Roy Boulting, and John Nash, veteran personalities of international cinema.

"Over there," Krishna said, "in London and in America, films are not such a secretive affair. It's the custom to show your film to other editors or directors for their comments. By showing my picture to these people I learnt a great deal. I got a totally new perspective. According to this perspective I re-edited the film *and now it doesn't appear to be an English version of a Hindi movie, which is what it looked like originally.*

"The English version is about fifty minutes shorter than the Hindi version in length, and moves at a faster pace without the songs and dances. If we re-edit the Hindi version according to the English version now we'll be able to make it faster too. Roy sent me pages of notes on the film. Now the English version is only about a hundred and five minutes long, with possibilities

of being cut shorter as I'm not done with the final cutting yet.

"We had quite a few problems in London, too. First, the technicolour laboratory was being renovated and our work was held up. *Then there was this problem we had with the Indian bureaucracy again. They let the English negative go out easily enough but created problems for the Hindi negative.* You see, I needed it all there because I had to do the sound and the 70 mm print of the Hindi version in London.

"We were all hoping that we'd have a finished picture for the Cannes Film Festival, where the best and largest number of deals are made. The picture wasn't ready because of the technicolour lab being renovated, but I didn't want to lose this once-a-year chance at the biggest film market. So I decided that if I couldn't show the picture I'd at least make contact with the people there and keep *Shalimar* in the news. So we started preparing a fifteen-minute production reel on the highlights of the film on videotape and decided to take it to the festival. After all, nobody really bothers to see all the films at festivals. This is not an original idea but we were among the first people to get away with it.

"With one problem solved we were faced with another. We couldn't get space for posters and hoardings because we were late and all advertising space had been booked long before. We couldn't even get a suite at the Carlton Hotel, which is the nerve-centre of the Festival because all the important delegates stay there and most of the sales deals are carried out in that hotel. We decided on having a float to advertise the film and we started this "WIN A RUBY CONTEST."

"Next, I spoke to Rex, Sylvia, and Zeenat to come to Cannes to promote the picture. Zeenat couldn't come because of her other producers in Bombay. Sylvia said she'd come and she came with her own PR man. Rex said he wouldn't promote the picture unless he saw it. He was then in Monte Carlo. I told him: 'Look Mr. Harrison I don't mind showing you the

picture. I don't even mind paying your to and fro passage from Monte Carlo to London to see the picture. But let me warn you, it's in its first rough-cut stage and the print is all shit. If you don't like it I'm not responsible. You alone are responsible.'

" 'What do you mean, I alone am responsible?' he asked.

" 'I mean you are responsible!' I replied. 'I've already warned you that in its present state the picture is not to be viewed.'

"So Rex decided to wait for the final print. But he came to Cannes all the same and he was the most important celebrity there. On his arrival at Cannes he was mobbed by about seven TV crews and something like eighty photographers, and the next day he made the headlines of the local newspapers."

"Two PROs were hired to promote the picture and we put out the "WIN A RUBY CONTEST" float. Quite a few producers contacted us about shooting a film in India and we encouraged them immensely. Unfortunately, there were only two representatives from the Indian film industry at the festival. One was Jagdish Parikh of the Film Finance Corporation and the other was director Mrinal Sen."

Between the completion and the release there are a thousand different kinds of problems to tackle—notably problems of marketing.

A whole set of international distributors had to be negotiated with, deals had to be made, there were arrangements for its release. It's a wholly different kind of a thrill when you know you've got it all under you—you're sitting on a finished product.

"John Nash sold my picture to Pakistan to a distributor by the name of Rahmat Fazli, a son of one of the famous Fazli brothers, well-known film-makers of India who migrated to Pakistan after Partition. He had to take the consent of General Zia himself to buy this picture. Of course, we couldn't sell him the Hindi version but I've told them that at the time of release

I'll take Dharam and Zeenat along with me to Pakistan for the premiere. This, I think, could be a step towards breaking the ice between the two countries."

"We've won the game!" Krishna told me exultantly on the eve of his latest departure to London in July 1978. "No matter who says what—we've made a Hollywood film in India, and we've also made an Indian film in India, and we've got away with it."

"*Shalimar* has been a terribly expensive film which has gone very much over the prescribed budget. Even after the shooting we've had to spend such a lot of money on it. The 70 mm prints are awfully expensive. Mining costs something like sixty pounds an hour in London. Plus the other expenses like the constant shuffling to and fro between Bombay and London, it all works up to quite a huge amount."

"I'm happy not merely because the movie's turned out so well. I'm happy because what we've achieved is going to open the way for other co-productions. We've made it possible to do a co-production on such a grand scale."

Yes, to that extent Krishna Shah is the pioneer. But whether others can do it as easily as he is a BIG IF. If you've read enough this book carefully you'll know what I mean by the BIG IF.

There aren't that many film stars around who can so easily think Indian as well as their American. There aren't that many Suresh Shaks around either, or so many who can get investment wholly through the Indian State Bank and many Ronnie Singhs who know how to get a production off the ground on paper, so that not one but two films can be completed in thirty days of continuous shooting. And there aren't that many Suresh Shaks around who could pull all these different threads together and keep everything in harmony.

Yet, *Shalimar* has undoubtedly set the trend in Indian cinema. national, think big. On its heels a whole new generation of films has been launched. Other smaller-scale productions are following

being attempted.

Right now, both Krishna Shah and Suresh Shah are readying the 70mm stereophonic sound prints of *Shalimar* for importation into India for the all-India release.

"Now that its release date is drawing near," Krishna told Suresh Shah the other day, "there are only two things that can happen to *Shalimar*. Either it'll be a big hit or it won't."

At the moment, the guns are silent. There is a lull before the final storm of ballyhoo, a storm that will be unleashed only after the Big Guns of *Shalimar* have given the nod of approval to its final version, and after the day of release in India has been fixed. It will be a simultaneous all-India release, of course, on a scale and magnitude never before attempted in the area of distribution and exhibition.

To succeed, it's not enough to do your best. It's got to be branded onto your subconscious, that you have no other go but to succeed. And so you have to work constantly at fever-pitch, doing better than your best. All the time.

That's the only way a creative being can really satisfy himself.

That's the only way he can honestly live with what he's created and feel: "This is it. It couldn't possibly be better."

After that, it becomes easy to go with your film before the people, all over the world. . . .

POSTSCRIPT

THE HUNGAMAS OF RELEASE

As the year 1978 raced into its final months the excitement of *Shalimar* began to mount feverishly.

Most of the time, during the June-through-September period, both Writer-Director Krishna Shah and Executive Producer Ranveer Singh were sitting in London going through the unending chores attendant on getting both versions ready for release.

A strike in the Technicolor Laboratory, London, cut into their schedule; other delays, for reasons beyond either their anticipation or control, set it back further. In between, Krishna Shah flew into Bombay and out again to London. Each time he came in, the distributors of *Shalimar* who were increasingly anxious about setting a release-date for the film flocked to Bombay, eager for "inside news" on the final 70mm prints, and when they would be brought into India.

It was a time of growing anxiety especially for Producer Suresh Shah who saw one very significant date on his calendar looming larger and larger as the weeks and months flew by.

That date was 27 October, 1978.

It was the deadline set in all the distribution agreements for *Shalimar*, the date before which the producers of the film were bound to effect delivery of the prints to its various distributors.

And if that date came and went without the prints being delivered to them, the distributors had an option clause written into their agreements by which they could exercise their option to decide whether or not they wanted to keep the picture AFTER witnessing a complete preview of the release-print!

27 October, 1978 came and went but because of certain formalities, the prints couldn't reach here on time!

By now, all the out-of-town distributors, whose in-town representatives had their ears close to the ground, were so anxious about the film that they landed up in Bombay and set up headquarters there. Many conferred amongst themselves as to what should be done. Actually, there was nothing anyone could do until the prints arrived, anyway. Some of the more enterprising distributors even talked long-distance to close friends and relatives in London to snoop around the laboratory and the editing-rooms there to get the real lowdown on what was really delaying them in London!

On two separate occasions, false announcements appeared in the film-trade papers that the *Shalimar* prints had left London and arrived at Bombay Customs! When they did arrive, finally, the *Shalimar* excitement hit the ceiling. Every single distribution office and distributor in Bombay—including those who had nothing to do with the film!—knew precisely when the prints landed, by which plane, on which flight, and so forth.

The week the *Shalimar* prints landed in Bombay, there was no other topic of discussion in Follywood, and rumours were flying thick and fast. Some said the Censors had banned the film; others said they'd cut the kisses and given it an 'A' Certificate; while still others said no, they'd kept the kisses and given it an 'A' Certificate.

By this time the all-India distributors were literally camped in the Laxmi Productions office in the penthouse suite atop Ramon House!

"We had to take them all into the room and show them the 70mm prints eventually!" Krishna Shah laughed. "It's only when they saw those huge reels which we later photographed and printed for our ad that they really believed us, that all was well with *Shalimar* and that it had really arrived at last in Bombay!"

Till then they'd thrown a tight cloak of secrecy around *Shalimar* and not one person even in the unit (with the exception of some members of Krishna Shah's Inner Core) had seen a single

frame of the most talked-about film of the year, even in rush-print stage.

The first preview, the very first, had to be held for the Censors. They had, of course, seen the film earlier, in rushes and passed it after recommending certain deletions. But the Certificate would be issued only after viewing the release print, to ensure that they were indeed carried out.

"There was so much keenness among the distributors," Krishna Shah said, "that some of them even pleaded to be allowed to watch the film when it was shown to the Censors! This was impossible, of course! And as a result new rumours cropped up that the Censors had now banned the film!

"Immediately after the Censor preview we organised a show for Suresh Shah," Krishna said. "Suresh agreed. He said: 'Yes, I'd like to see it. But all alone, on my own.'

"So we fixed up a preview at Rajendra Kumar's mini-theatre, Dimple, on the night of 2 December. I dared not go near that theatre myself that night—I was that jittery! But I'd brought this pint bottle of Chivas Regal back from the plane when I returned, so I sent that along!"

And that night, this taciturn, quiet man whose stake was much higher than anyone else's in the world on this film, sat alone in the auditorium of Dimple and, sipping his Chivas Regal, he viewed what Krishna Shah aptly termed "his mail-order bride".

Who knows what thoughts passed through his mind as he sat there and viewed his film that night?

"I was sitting at home, almost gnawing at my fingernails!" Krishna Shah grinned. "Late at night—in the early hours of the morning actually, it was past 1 A.M.—I got a phone-call from Suresh. He told me: 'Krishna, the picture is fantastic. It won't come out of the theatres for one year at least. The picture is excellent—but why on earth did you send only a half-bottle of Chivas?' "

Immediately after Suresh Shah saw the film, Krishna ripped

the veil of secrecy from *Shalimar* and threw it open for viewing to all his distributors, their families, their friends and to all those who were riding the *Shalimar* bandwagon in one capacity or another.

"We held the first preview for Vakil Singh and his friends," Krishna Shah said. "We screened it on the huge screen at the New Excelsior in Bombay. *I wanted Vakil Singh to be the first to see it because he had been the first to buy it. He had been lucky for Shalimar throughout. And when he came away from that trial he was simply crazy about the movie!*"

Innumerable previews were now being held in the late November period. Distributors and friends, producers and friends, all and sundry in the movie-industry who had even the slightest "pull" in order to get invited to a *Shalimar* preview—got invited to a *Shalimar* preview.

The rest simply gate-crashed.

The immediate result of throwing *Shalimar* open in preview shows to the distributors, the trade and the industry was to let loose a fresh spate of rumours.

This time the rumours were that most of the distributors had decided to exercise their option and leave the film!

Not Dossani, of course. I'd heard from Romu Sippy that Dossani had liked the film. Romu also confirmed that *Shalimar* was now, after viewing, carrying good reports. I heaved a sigh of relief.

Not Vakil Singh, either.

Then who? Who had walked out on *Shalimar*? Or who was planning to walk out on *Shalimar*? Or who was actually walking out on *Shalimar*?

I myself have lots of friends in film distribution circles and I'd heard earlier on that my hugely-proportioned friend S.K. Agarwal, the Agarwal of the pleasant voice and the charming

manner, had opted out of *Shalimar*.

It's better to hear Krishna Shah tell it, so over to him again. . .

"There were, of course, lots of rumours about this or that distributor leaving the film. Through all of them Suresh Shah stood steady as a rock. He was absolutely confident of the movie, and he told all his distributors—'Any of you don't want my picture, just come over to my office and take your money back!'

"When Ramesh Sippy (S.K. Agarwal's partner in B.R.A. Film Distributors) saw the picture with the rest of the distributors, he liked it. Along with everybody else, he too paid up the money for the raw stock for the release-prints. He'd already made all the theatre-bookings and so forth for releasing the film in the Bombay circuit.

"S.K. Agarwal, who is Ramesh Sippy's partner in B.R.A., arrived in Bombay from Delhi during the third or fourth preview screening of the film. He arrived at the theatre just before the intermission, and he wanted to walk in, and sit in on the preview after having missed almost the entire first half!"

This was obviously unfair to the makers, who'd spent two years of sleepless days and nights making the film. They pleaded with Mr Agarwal not to sit in on a preview that was half over, and he eventually saw it from their point of view and agreed to see the film another day. So the next day (7 December) another preview was held for Mr Agarwal and his friends.

"The next day Mani Mistry and I went down to Suresh Shah's office to discuss the arrangement for the premiere. Upstairs in Laxmi Productions the entire staff was frantic with overwork organising the Press Show, the premiere, the post-premiere party, writing out invitations, and so forth.

"As we were going in we found Ramesh Sippy coming out of Suresh Shah's office. He greeted us hurriedly and went his way. Inside, Suresh looked coolly up at us. In a calm and confident

voice he said: 'B.R.A. have left the picture.'

"It hit us hard and brutal between the eyes." I turned cold. I almost panicked, thinking: *If one goes out there may be a run on the movie, and all may go out.*"

Like every rumour and hard fact this bit of information spread like wildfire all through the movie-industry and distribution trade not only in Bombay but all over India, in a matter of minutes!

Within a few hours of the news of B.R.A. leaving *Shalimar* Suresh Shah received not one, but three offers! The Hinduja's of Dharma Distributors were the first to call; they offered much more than the B.R.A. price; so Suresh accepted their offer and paid B.R.A. back their money. A while later another party called bettering the Hinduja's offer by two lakhs of rupees. But Suresh had already said yes to the Hinduja's and the question of going back on his word did not arise.

Market rumours say that the following morning S.K. Agarwal rang up to say he'd like to keep the picture after all! Apparently he'd had a dream in which Goddess Bhagvati appeared to him and told him not to give up the picture! Can you imagine that? But it was too late. Within minutes of the change at source, changes all along the line (theatres, newspaper-ads, hoardings, posters, bookings, outstation theatre-chains, etc.) had already been effected. There was no going back now.

For the record, only one other distributor left *Shalimar*—Prem Films of the C.I.-Rajasthan territory. But that, too, was no problem. The fabulous Narayandas-jee of Screen Gems came to Bombay, saw a preview with his little daughter and grabbed the movie.

I do not know how far this is true, but others who were present told me that Narayandas-jee's daughter liked the film so much she told her father immediately after the preview was over that he *must* buy it!

Right through the *Shalimar* adventure the man who remained cool and steady as a rock was Suresh Shah, a man whom I have come to regard as the ideal film-financier, the likes of whom one wishes there were more of in our movie-industry.

Suresh had total and implicit faith in Krishna and this faith remained unshakeable and intact, irrespective of the thousands of crises they faced, weathered and overcame in those two years or more they were together for the making of this remarkable film.

"Whenever there was any problem and we'd rush to Suresh with it," Krishna Shah said, "he'd always be sitting there behind that desk of his in his large office. And he'd always say: 'God is Great.'

"It was his most favourite line. Any calamities occurred, Suresh would say: 'God is Great. Nothing will go wrong.'

"Whenever we'd go to his office for talks he'd invariably begin the discussion by saying in Gujarati: 'I am sitting down here—but God is sitting up there!'

"If *Shalimar* is complete and released and a success today it's this remarkable man's faith that made it possible."

They were planning a gala premiere for the night of Thursday, 14 December to be followed by a fabulous post-premiere party. Suddenly, a phone call came through reminding them that 14 December was Raj Kapoor's birthday, and that the entire industry would be going to his party that night! What to do? They were caught on the horns of a dilemma again.

"On Monday morning (that is, 11 December)," Krishna Shah said, "the advance-booking opened in Bombay at the various theatres where *Shalimar* was booked.

"Early that morning I took a car and went to the Novelty

cinema at Grant Road to see what it'd be like. My God—what a sight it was! Thousands of people queued up outside the theatre, huge and unruly crowds shouting and yelling, hordes of police vans stationed there, and total chaos.

"There was a restiveness, an unruly atmosphere because these huge crowds all wanted tickets! There was a *lathi* charge by the police. God, I wish I'd taken my camera along. People were getting all trampled upon and beaten up, just because they wanted tickets to see my film! I drove off to the New Excelsior and it was the same there!"

This was a whole new experience for Krishna Shah and I do not think he'll ever forget it, no matter how many films he makes in future and how well they do at the box-office.

Anyway, back to the *hungamas* of release . . .

Because of Raj Kapoor's birthday celebrations on the night of 14 December they decided to shift the *Shalimar* premiere to the following night. It was a unique experience, that premiere. Leading-lady Zeenat Aman, who was shooting for another film in far-away Jaisalmer, flew down to Bombay specially to attend it. Practically everybody who was anybody in Follywood was there.

After the premiere was over everybody rushed off to the Taj where they caroused and celebrated till dawn. Polydor of India gave away gold discs that night to commemorate the sale of over 500,000 units of the sound-track L.P. of *Shalimar*, to everybody important on the technical, artistic and creative side of the making of the film and its music.

I think the premiere night of *Shalimar* will remain etched in Krishna Shah's memory as long as he lives. No matter whether he returns to India to make another film here or not, he will cherish the Indian experience forever.

When the lights came on during the intermission of the premiere-show, Krishna Shah went up on stage and faced the audience. There, jam-packed before him were well over a thousand

of the most important members of the film-industry, of the production, distribution and exhibition sectors in India.

Looking out over row upon row of expectant faces, some known and remembered, others strange and unfamiliar, Krishna Shah felt a lump in his throat and a strange sensation behind his eyes as the pent-up emotions of the entire *Shalimar* adventure welled up within him in one single overwhelming wave of nostalgia.

And as he spoke, he thanked first his unit members, acknowledging their contribution by name, he thanked them all for their cooperation and their help in making this picture.

Then he said:

"I also thank the entire Indian film industry for teaching me so many unique things. I have learnt all about commitment and how to honour them. For the two years that I've been here with my wife and son, you people have given me so much love and affection that these two years of my life have been a most joyous experience. Indeed, the making of *Shalimar* in India has been a pleasure in my life."

"I want here to refer to Victor Hugo's famous lines. He said: 'There is no force in the world as powerful as the idea whose time has come.'"

And then he added: "Maybe co-production is that idea whose time has come, and I hope *Shalimar* is the film."

Before signing off his testimony to relations here when I said in my weekly column "Spotlight" in *The Guide* a few weeks before the first release of *Shalimar*.

Krishna Shah was in a more jovial mood of course, when he spoke to the members of the Film International Society on the evening of Tuesday 15 December 1971. He said to them:

"... that's why I always say I am more at home in India. Coming from a country that has been my country

after so many years, and yet receiving such love from the people here, all these things can never be recreated.

"It has been such a touching experience for me, an experience that can never be recreated no matter how many more films I make, and where. Such experiences occur only once a lifetime and I'd like to leave it at that. I'd like it to remain a unique experience for me, one I'll treasure for the rest of my life."

What I'd written in *Trade Guide* was this, and it is the same thing really, though stated more objectively.

I had written:

"There are, I know, many people who wish *Shalimar* ill. There are many people who will open bottles of champagne to celebrate the (so-called) failure of the film, just as bottles of champagne were opened when Yash Chopra's *Kabhi Kabhie* was released, to celebrate its hoped-for flopping. *But Kabhi Kabhie became a box-office hit and the champagne inevitably turned to urine.*

"We know, of course, that the public who buys tickets is the final arbiter of the fate of a box-office movie. We know that this is the crux of the business because the entertainment industry is Big Business. But that is not the point.

"The point is that Suresh Shah and Krishna Shah have achieved what they set out to do against incredible odds. They made the impossible possible.

"In attempting, completing and releasing *Shalimar* in the same style and the same flamboyance with which Hollywood presents any of its major motion-pictures, these two men have widened the horizons of commercial film-making in our country.

"Because of that, no matter what its eventual outcome at the box-offices, *Shalimar* will always remain a landmark in the history of Indian cinema."



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